

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1926

VOL. LXXXIX

NUMBER 2

Scarlet Poppies

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THIS GRINGO DARED TO LOVE
BELOW THE RIO GRANDE, WHERE PASSION IS A
CONSUMING FIRE AND JEALOUSY A MANIA

By Mary Imlay Taylor

BILL GLASGOW may not have intended to fall in love—" *Quien sabe?*" as old Tomaso would say—but it proved to be something utterly beyond his control. Life is like that, the unexpected thing happens.

It was as unexpected as the hurricane on a tropic sea, and as swift as the flash of a falling star. It swept away the memory of a certain fair-haired girl north of the Rio Grande, the girl whom Glasgow had always intended to marry some day, as it had already swept away his prejudices, and even the fixed purposes of his life.

It was like a dream sweet with the heavy fragrance of the yellow jasmynes abloom in the *patios*, aflame with the scarlet poppies that she wore in her hair.

She was "La Amapola—The Poppy," as half South America and all Mexico had enthusiastically named this beautiful dancer and song bird, Consuelo Cordoba. A slip of a girl in reality, not yet twenty years

old, she had been born up in the foothills of the Sierra Madre, of old Castilian stock for her parentage.

There was in her veins, however, a drop—a mere drop—of Aztec blood, that gave strength to a young body as straight and slim as the stem of a pepper tree, and a nectarine glow to the oval of a face that otherwise might have had only the ivory pallor of Spain.

That night, on the plaza, when they watched the New Year candles, a vagrant breeze swept her long black *chal*, with the scarlet poppies on it, across Glasgow's breast. The silken fragrance of the thing touched his cheek, and suddenly, madly, he caught it up, buried his whitened face in it, and kissed it.

No one saw the gesture but the girl herself, no one noticed; but Glasgow knew that the most wonderful thing in life had befallen him, and nothing else mattered! The stars might have come down then to

be flames in the New Year candles of the peons, it would not have surprised him.

"Consuelo!" he whispered. There was a strange tightening in his throat, and he could only repeat her name. "Consuelo!"

Wise for her years in the ways of men and of love, Consuelo laughed lightly, although her eyes were wet. He could not see them in the shadow of the big pecan tree.

"Look, *amigo*, they are lighting their candles," she murmured. "The bells are beginning to ring!"

He did not heed the bells. He knew the custom of the peons, the old superstition, to light candles at midnight and test the wind with their flames.

If it is to be a good year, and the corn is to ripen in the ear, and the grapes to purple on the vines, the flames of the candles will show it on New Year Eve, when they are lit and held high up under the midnight stars. It is a pretty custom, and a quaint one, but Glasgow did not care for it then, nor for the Indians waiting to light their candles. He cared only for the girl.

Consuelo had slipped away from him, put him off; she was out on the plaza, watching the crowd. Glasgow followed, hot at heart.

Did she mean to evade him? For a moment he thought so; then she flung him a smile over her shoulder, and the sheer beauty and tenderness of it shook him to the soul.

The bells were ringing, the music filled his ears now—a new year was born!

He stood beside her silently. He had no words. The lights on the plaza were dim; only the long façade of the cathedral was lifted out of the gloom, ghostly and beautiful in form.

Here and there a little oil lamp smoked beside a vender of peanuts or *enchiladas*, but the night was dark until the peons began to light their candles, hundreds of candles, held high, their little yellow flames flickering, fantastic as fairy lamps under the shadowy branches of the big pecan trees.

"If the wind is right, there'll be a good year," Consuelo declared softly. "Look, *señor*, isn't it pretty—all the little flames of the candles?"

"There's a breeze stirring," Glasgow said. "Hear the leaves of the pecans whispering?"

He was not looking at the candles, but

at her, and Consuelo knew it. She laughed gayly with her lips only, for she was trembling from head to foot.

That night at the theater, before the curtain fell, she had seen Don Cesar Rojas—and if he found her here with an American, a gringo, he would kill him. There was no doubt about that—not a bit of doubt!

In a mad moment Consuelo had flirted with Don Cesar; that was before she knew Glasgow. It was harmless enough—her coquetry. It gave Cesar no claim upon her. Why, there were hundreds of gallants who had tossed bouquets to "La Amapola!"

But she had set Don Cesar mad, and when he asked her to marry him—begged an actress to take his great name—she had laughed at him. She did not mean to marry any one, she said.

At that the storm broke in a whirlwind of passion. Consuelo had been frightened; never before had she seen a man so mad with love for her, and many men had loved her!

She had done the worst thing in the world with a man like Don Cesar. She had temporized, almost given him hope, to get rid of him, for her knees were shaking under her. Now, if he found that she was playing him false, he would kill her—that was all!

Poor Consuelo! Up to the moment she met Glasgow she had thought she might have to marry Don Cesar, but now the whole world was changed. She was a year older, a year wiser, and something within her had crystallized.

She knew she would not marry Don Cesar, but he might kill her, or he might kill Glasgow. If he was sure that there was anything between them, he would probably kill them both! She knew it, but because she was an actress she laughed gayly, although every quick step behind them on the pavement of the plaza sent her heart into her throat.

"There! They're happy," she said to Glasgow in English, her adorable English with its exotic accent. "The candle flames—watch them. Don't watch me so, *amigo*!"

"There's no one else to watch in the world," Glasgow declared, soberly. It bewitched him to see her turn and sway in the glowing dusk, her lithe young body in its black sheath of a dress, the scarlet pop-

pies on her *chal* like flames in the candle-light.

"There's old Tomaso!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Our porter. Tomaso!" She ran to the old peon and caught his candle away from him, holding it up in the breeze. "I want to try, too! Will it be a good year, Tomaso?"

The old man blinked at the candle, watching it. "*Sí, niña* Consuelo. Look but at—*Madre de Dios!*"

The candle had gone out in the girl's hand!

Other candles were burning steadily, leaping up, sputtering, but still aflame; only Consuelo's had gone out. She stood with it in her hand, looking at it, her face grown suddenly white, her eyes dilated in fear.

"Oh, Tomaso!" she breathed, and she caught her *chal* against her breast, the poppies on it turning blood red in the light of a peanut vender's smoking little lamp.

"It's bad luck!" Old Tomaso snatched the candle and tried to relight it, but the match went out in the hollow of his horny hand. He, too, was frightened. "*Madre de Dios*, it—it means death, *niña* Consuelo!" He crossed himself hurriedly.

"Death?" The girl's eyes widened yet more with terror. "No, no; you're wrong, Tomaso; not death!" she gasped, white-lipped, shaken.

He nodded, staring hard at the candle where the tallow had melted and run down in a long drop on the side of it. "A bad year, *niña* Consuelo; a bad year and—death, or that which is near to death—for you! See how it has guttered?"

They were talking in Spanish, almost in whispers, but Glasgow caught the drift of it. He snatched the candle out of Tomaso's hand and flung it into the bushes.

"Here—go and buy twenty more candles," he said harshly, "and light them all. It's going to be a good year—the best year the world's ever seen!"

Tomaso only shook his head, mumbling, and looking at Consuelo. "A bad year," he insisted; "a bad year for *niña* Consuelo!" He crossed himself again.

She laughed, but her laughter wavered; her fingers were trembling. Glasgow took them in his hands.

"Come," he said quickly, "it's over. They say it will be a good year; I know it will be! I'm going to take you home, Consuelo; your hands are cold—it is late."

He drew her resolutely away from the plaza, but she looked back over her shoulder. She could see the little yellow flames of the New Year candles all crowded together until they made a glow in the darkness like the stars of the Milky Way.

"They're lucky; theirs are still burning," she murmured, half to herself; "only mine went out!"

Glasgow was almost angry with her; he had been angry with old Tomaso and his talk about death and a candle! The babbling old idiot! he thought fiercely—but the girl was trembling.

"Consuelo, you know it's all nonsense," he said. "You're much too clever for such foolishness!"

They were alone in the long street that led to her aunt's house—*la Calle de los Corazones Quebrados*—the Street of Broken Hearts. It was exceedingly narrow, and the sidewalks were high, so that the spring floods from the foothills should not wash over the curbs. A chain ran across the street over their heads, and a large oil lantern was swung upon it, its smoky glow only serving to make the darkness visible.

In the dim light Glasgow could not see her face plainly, only the outline of her small proud head, the high Spanish comb, and the scarlet poppies; but the fragrance of her *chal* was against his shoulder, and her fingers brushed his sleeve. She did not answer, and he caught her hand again and held it.

"Consuelo," he whispered, other words utterly failing him.

She was not yet twenty, but she was Spanish; romance and fatalism ran in her blood. She said nothing, but she looked up at him, and even in the semidarkness of the smoking lantern overhead, and the walled in *calle*, he saw her eyes. He did not know that her knees were like water beneath her, and that her heart beat in her throat.

They had come to the door of her aunt's home. Doña Antonia Mendoza lived in a cream-colored house with ironed windows that looked like a jail, and was beautiful within, its *patio* blazing with poppies and sweet with yellow jasmine. The great front doors were barred, but a little door was set in each of the big ones for ordinary use, and one of these stood open.

Old Anica, Tomaso's wife, was waiting for Consuelo. She held a candle in her

hand, and its light flared upward on a brown old face that looked like an evaporated peach. Consuelo slipped away from Glasgow and ran to her, smiling back over her shoulder.

"To-morrow, *amigo*," she said softly. "*Buenas noches!*"

Glasgow stood helplessly. Old Anica shut the door in his face, and he heard the chain bolt slip into its socket. It was one o'clock in the morning, the street was still; he looked up and saw the stars shining.

He was turning away disconsolately, feeling that she had left him without an answer, and then he saw a faint light behind a long French window that was securely barred with iron upon the street.

He watched it breathlessly. The glass doors swung inward, and a girl's head was outlined against the light.

He sprang to the window and caught her hand through the bars. She was laughing softly now, a laugh that was near to tears.

"*Amigo!*"

The whisper, tremulously sweet, was music to Glasgow's ears. He drew her hand through the bars and kissed it.

"Consuelo, I love you," he said. "I don't know how to talk Spanish love to you. I never felt so dumb in my life before. I'm as dumb as a fish! But I—gosh, I can't tell you—" He choked. "I—I just love you, Consuelo!"

She forgot Don Cesar and her fear of him. She leaned closer against the bars until her cheek brushed against them.

"I love you, too, *amigo!*" she whispered.

He drew her closer. They kissed—between the iron bars her aunt had set there to safeguard the house!

He would have stayed thus, holding her hands through the irons, talking or silent, until daybreak, but she would not let him. She began to remember her fears again, and gently drew her hands away.

"You must go," she whispered. "Tia Antonia will wake up."

Tia Antonia! How he detested the fat, waddling old woman with her sharp eyes and the dark line of down on her short upper lip. These Spanish girls, even song birds like Consuelo, were watched by perfect old dragons, who knew their charges' value in the marriage market, and watched over it—as the old peon women watched the prices of new-laid eggs and hot tamales.

Glasgow had frequently wished that ban-

aits would capture Tia Antonia, and there was no doubt at all that she hated gringos. Not even a wealthy gringo would have appealed to her, and certainly not a man who was merely an agent for one of the big New York fruit companies.

"To-morrow—I will come for you to-morrow, Consuelo!" he said eagerly.

She assented; she would have assented to nearly anything he could say. She must get him to go away quickly—so quickly! Her keen ear had caught the sound of footsteps in the distance. It might be anybody and it might be—

Glasgow had her hands through the bars, and he drew her closer. Again their lips touched. Then she sent him away.

She was afraid, terribly afraid, of those footsteps. They were coming nearer and nearer. She hid in the shadow of the window and watched until she saw the tall Glasgow turn the corner safely.

Then terror seized upon her again. The footsteps were across the street.

A man came over so quickly that she scarcely had time to push the long window doors shut and thrust home the bolt before he was at them. He reached in through the stout bars and tried to open the window, calling her name.

"Consuelo! Are you there?" The voice was low but fierce with passion. "Consuelo!"

It was Don Cesar Rojas! Had he seen a man go from her window? If he had, if he knew that she had let another man kiss her through the window bars, he would kill her!

He had seen something, she knew that by his voice—and he wanted to be sure. Thank Heaven, he wasn't sure!

Consuelo scarcely dared to draw a long breath. Then she saw the window give, and threw herself against it. There were the usual heavy inside doors to shut at night, but she had no time to close them. She held the glass doors, although the lock pressed hard into the tender flesh of her arm.

But for the iron bars outside the window, which held Don Cesar almost at arm's length, he could have forced it easily, but he could not throw his strength against it, and the girl's slender body barred it. He shook the glass doors furiously, calling to her.

"Consuelo!" He was sure that he had glimpsed her there, that she had been talk-

ing to the man who had vanished so quickly at the corner. The cursed darkness of *la Calle de los Corazones Quebrados!* But he would find out, he would be sure! "Consuelo—it is I! It is Cesar!"

The girl was silent, holding the window shut with all her strength. If it gave an inch, and he saw her, this man who loved her so madly would kill her. No other man should have her; he had sworn it, and she knew it.

Her knees were shaking under her, but she clung to the window, silently, with all the strength she had in her lithe young body, afraid that he would know almost by instinct that she was on the other side of the glass doors.

"Consuelo," he whispered hoarsely. "Answer me! It's only Cesar!"

Mother of God, how well she knew who it was! Only Don Cesar! Don Cesar, waiting to be sure that she was false to him before he killed her.

The girl bit her lips to keep back a cry of sheer terror. The furious man out there in the night frightened her, but the situation did not strike her as especially strange or cruel; it was love as she knew it. She understood it herself, for if the man she loved was false to her, if Glasgow—she set her little white teeth hard on her underlip, and her dark eyes flamed in the dusk.

Don Cesar shook the window again.

"Consuelo!" he called to her softly.

She held the window against him, trembling and praying a little, for she loved life.

If only some one would come—the watchman with his lantern, calling out in the night, "All's well!" Or Anica, or her fat aunt, who slept so soundly! The window was giving—*Madre de Dios*, the window was giving!

She pressed her young body against it as it swayed inward. She thought her arm was breaking!

Then, suddenly, she heard footsteps, and a voice.

"Eh, *señor*, you there?"

It was old Tomaso, back from the plaza. Don Cesar drew away from the bars.

"Where is the *señorita*?" he demanded hoarsely.

"*Niña* Consuelo?" Tomaso cackled. "She must be in bed and asleep these two hours, Don Cesar. Two hours ago she went from the theater. She is asleep."

Consuelo slipped silently to the floor.

On her white arm were two long purple marks where the window had pressed into the young flesh and tortured it.

II

GLASGOW, who as yet knew too little of Don Cesar even to be jealous of him, sat in his *patio* and smoked until daybreak. The perfume of the jasmines reminded him of Consuelo, and he had bought some scarlet poppies and filled the big earthenware jar with them.

The flame of those blossoms was like the flame of the poppies on her black *chal angosto*, the long silken scarf that she wore about her bare white shoulders and wove into the fantastic figures of her dance, a floating, waving, graceful thing aflame with color. It had given her the name she bore—"La Amapola—the Poppy."

If he closed his eyes he could see it there in the *patio*, the filmy black of it waving and rippling as she moved, the flame of it burning red in the dazzle of footlights—the *chal* of Consuelo!

Glasgow had fallen suddenly in love with the old house, with the *patio*, and the well with its bucket on a rusty hinge, the worn brick pavement of it, the scent of mildew in the walls, and the quaint old furniture, sparse enough as it is in Mexican houses, dark with age and meticulous usage. Don Santos Ortega had recommended the house and old Mariana, the cook, to him.

"You'll find them both pretty good," he told Glasgow. "The house will cost you twelve dollars a month, and the cook four. She does the washing, too."

Glasgow, fresh from the high prices of the States, was incredulous.

"Gosh, Ortega, you're kidding me! Cooking and washing for four bucks a month? Impossible!"

"It's all she gets. The house is haunted, of course. They all are! Keep shy of Mexican knives; the peons carry them in their sashes."

"After all, my dear fellow," Don Santos added with his provoking drawl, "you're only a gringo!"

Glasgow grinned at that. He and Ortega had been at college together, and now he was in Mexico in the interests of a large fruit importing house in New York, and Don Santos was in the Federal army, ready to suppress another revolution at any moment. They had kept their friendship.

At this time Ortega was outside the

town, watching an ominous gathering in the hills. He had told Glasgow that another outbreak was imminent.

"We'll do some fighting then! If I could get my hand on the leaders!" Ortega's face was a smiling mask. "I'd make short work of it."

"You mean?" Glasgow knocked the ashes from his pipe thoughtfully.

Ortega was a young dandy, handsome and silken as a girl, but Glasgow knew that he had the passions and the fierce pride of the Spaniard under his lazy smile.

"Drumhead court-martial and the firing squad," Don Santos replied sweetly.

The words came back to Glasgow now, oddly enough, for his mind was filled with thoughts of Consuelo, with the touch of her hand and her lips. Yet, suddenly, the flower-scented *patio* faded out, and he seemed to see—not the *bailarina*, but Don Santos, the dandy, with his cigarette in his delicately manicured fingers, and the sudden deadly smile in his half-shut eyes.

"Gosh, he meant it, too!" Glasgow mused, smoking. "They're all like that—fire and tow, both the men and the women—and, *Madre de Dios*, as they say, how a woman like that could love!"

If he had won Consuelo—but had he? How was a man to be sure of a beautiful singer and dancer with half the world at her feet? His world, too, would question his good sense in this mad pursuit of "The Poppy."

It did not matter. She was the one woman in the whole world for him, and he knew it.

What did it matter if half the time he saw her behind the footlights, with the make-believe of the stage around her? She was beautiful there, a swaying, exquisite figure, a small proud head, the shadows under the eyes deepened, a splash of carmine on the lips, the perfect arms white against the black *chal* with the flame of its poppies!

He was going to marry her, he was resolved on that, but what to do about Tía Antonia was something as yet beyond his ken. Here in Mexico the male of the family seemed to shelter and feed innumerable ancient female relatives, the haciendas were full of them, and Tía Antonia appeared to be a permanent attachment of Consuelo's!

What were the customs of courtship in Mexico? What did they do with these waddling old *duennas*?

Of course, if he had money—he grew hot at the thought. He knew well enough that money would turn the trick, money and ancient lineage, with the avaricious Tía Antonia!

But the mere thought of it seemed to soil Consuelo, to make her a chattel in the market. He could not endure it. Yet there must be some method of procedure, some formal way of courtship that would be the open and honorable thing.

If Don Santos had not gone out to the Salazar hacienda, fifty miles from town, he would have consulted him, although he had an uneasy feeling that Don Santos would take much the same view of the affair that his own people in the United States would take of it.

"The *bailarina*?" He could see Don Santos light his cigarette, that deadly smile under his drooping eyelids.

At the thought of it, Glasgow arose from his seat and tramped to and fro in the *patio*. Unconsciously his hand clenched; he would let no man, not even Don Santos, cast an aspersion upon Consuelo. He would shoot him first!

It was daybreak now, and a long shaft of light pierced the dusk of the *patio*. In it he saw the poppies bloom in the gray earthenware jar. Blood red they were, with the drip of the dew on them—wet like blood.

Again he felt the warmth of her hand in his, the touch of her lips through the bars—and again, like a flash, he seemed to see the long blank wall, a man against it, with his hands tied behind his back, facing the firing squad! Nonsense!

What was this thing that possessed him? Don Santos and his drumhead court-martial—or some whimsy in his blood? He swore softly under his breath, and went for a bath and a shave before breakfast. When he finally sat down for the morning meal, he had no relish for it. Old Mariana, solicitous for her *señor's* well being, remarked his loss of appetite.

"You eat nothing; you smoke all the time, *señor*!" she remonstrated.

"I eat like a tiger, Mariana," he assured her, attacking a cup of the thick, sweet chocolate that she whipped to a froth with a stick. It burned his tongue, but he drank it gallantly.

She hovered, serving him, like a mother bird anxiously offering worms to her nestling. Glasgow looked up into her wrinkled

brown face and her keen bright eyes, and the spirit moved him to talk.

"Mariana," he began, absently, in his best Spanish, "when a man's in love in Mexico, how the devil does he go about courting? There's always a fat old woman on hand. How does he do it? Does he have to marry the old woman first, and kill her, before he gets the girl?"

"*Madre de Dios, señor*, that would be murder!" Mariana cried, shocked.

"Well, if he doesn't kill her, how does he ever get a chance to—" Glasgow groped desperately for the Spanish word, and Mariana waited, wide eyed, the butter dish in her hands.

"The gringo is mad!" she thought.

"Gosh, what the devil is the Spanish for popping the question?" Glasgow muttered in English, then said desperately: "Oh, you know what I mean, Mariana; what does a man do when he's in love?"

Mariana was cautious. "He may throw a bouquet in the vestibule"—she called it "*el zaguán*"—"when the porter has the big doors open in the morning to sweep, *señor*."

"Suppose it never got beyond the porter's broom?"

Mariana considered this, nodding her head wisely.

"One may join a *gallo*," she said.

"There will be a *gallo* soon."

"In the dictionary a *gallo* is a rooster," Glasgow remarked. "Am I to understand that the fat duenna is really a witch with a broomstick, and a Mexican lover can be transformed into a rooster at will?"

"A *gallo* is a band to serenade, *señor*," Mariana explained, patiently. "The young man must get a license for the band and some one to sing love songs—*canciones amorosas*. They go at night and sing under the *señorita's* window. A rooster crows at night on the hour, *señor*, therefore it is called the serenading party, 'the *gallo*.'"

"Ah, I see!" Glasgow leaned back in his chair and began to fill his pipe. "In my country, Mariana, a lover is frequently called an ass, but never a rooster. Suppose, instead, the suitor simply went and made love to the fat old aunt?"

Mariana cackled knowingly. "That is what Don Cesar Rojas has done, so Tomaso says. Don Cesar is to marry the great *bailarina*—*la Amapola*, they call her. Surely you know, *señor*? *Señorita Consuelo Cordoba*, all the world knows her.

Madre de Dios, how she dances, how she sings! Don Cesar is a great man, *señor*, and a great soldier. Some say he'll be one day President of Mexico!"

Glasgow arose from his chair. He was a tall, rawboned American with Scotch-Irish blood far back in his ancestry.

When his face whitened like that, there was something about him that made old Mariana catch her breath. He hadn't the suavity of the Mexican don, he was red-headed and grim jawed, and his fists looked more formidable to her than the rolling stone of the *metate* where she ground her corn.

"*Señorita Consuelo Cordoba* is to marry Don Cesar Rojas? Is that true, Mariana?"

"That is true, *señor*." The old woman wagged her head at him. "I have it from Tomaso, the porter, and Anica, the cook. Doña Antonia has settled it with Don Cesar; he will pay for the wedding and the wedding dress and the cake, though the *señorita* makes great money singing, but Doña Antonia would have it so. Tomaso knows; he held the silver candlestick with the tall blessed candle in it they got from the church, while the papers were signed, and *Señor Lopez*, the notary, was there as a witness."

Glasgow seized the old woman by the shoulders and shook her.

"Is this true? Answer me!" he cried violently. "Is this the truth, or are you lying to me?"

Old Mariana gasped, her eyes popping with sheer fright.

"He's mad!" she thought. "*Madre de Dios*, help me, the gringo's gone mad!" But aloud she wheezed faintly: "It is true, I swear it by—the memory of my mother who is dead, I swear it, *señor*!"

Glasgow paid no attention to the oath, he scarcely heard it, but he looked deep into the old woman's black eyes, and saw that she was telling the truth as far as she knew it. He released her so abruptly that she reeled back and snatched at the table, overturning his cup of hot chocolate in her fright.

But he took no notice of it. He strode to the front door, and, undoing the elaborate fastenings, flung it open.

The fact that it was a glorious morning was not even apparent to Glasgow; he had but one thought in mind, he must see *Consuelo* and find out the truth. Had she been fooling him?

There were a hundred reasons why Mariana's story might be true. In the first place, he knew well enough that his standing was that of "a gringo"; in other words, that of a hated foreigner in a land where tradition and blood and passionate pride were alike allied against him.

In the second, he knew that Tía Antonia would move heaven and earth to outwit him. As for Consuelo—The very thought of her brought back the madness of that moment on the plaza when he had kissed the scarlet poppies on her *chal*. He knew he was madly, helplessly in love with her, yet she was "La Amapola," the song bird, the *bailarina*. Was not the answer enough for a sane man?

He knew he was not sane about her, but why should she prefer him to the hundreds of adorers among her own countrymen? Why should she choose Bill Glasgow, of New York, rather than Don Cesar Rojas, descended from a Castilian grandee, doubtless, who could wear his hat in the presence of the king—or knock the king's hat off, which was it?

Glasgow wouldn't have given a cent for either privilege, but he wanted, at the moment, the greater privilege of giving Don Cesar a knock-out blow on the point of the jaw.

There was a long street, then the corner above the casino, and a short, walled-in *calle* between his house and the *Calle de los Corazones Quebrados*. Glasgow turned them quickly, side stepping for the frothing streams of soapsuds running out from under *patio* gates—as the laundresses emptied their washtubs!

The windows were carefully closed in the Mendoza house this morning, but old Tomaso answered Glasgow's impatient summons. He did not open the door, however; he only slipped a shutter that closed the little grille and peeped out, his brown face as shriveled as a withered pecan nut, and his black eyes guarded.

"*Niña Consuelo* is at the theater, *señor*," he said, in answer to Glasgow's eager question.

"At this hour?" Glasgow did not believe it. "That's a lie! Go back and tell her that I'm here, Tomaso."

Tomaso shook his head with an air of melancholy. "She's at the theater, *señor*. *Madre de Dios*, why should I lie, *señor*?"

Glasgow put his hand in his pocket, and Tomaso's brown hand came out through

the grille. Something passed between them.

"It's as much as my place is worth, *señor*," the old porter whispered, "but it's true—what I say. Doña Antonia will not let you in. You will see *niña Consuelo* only at the theater."

"I hear voices in the *patio*," said Glasgow sternly; "there's a man there. Is it Don Cesar Rojas, Tomaso?"

Tomaso's shriveled old brown face seemed to shrivel yet more. He said nothing; he touched his lips with his finger, nodded, and shut the grille.

For a moment Glasgow stood and looked at the big doors, with the little doors set in them, after the fashion of theater make-believes, and the entrances of ancient fortresses, and his face went white as the sunshine on the white walls of Tía Antonia's house, then he turned and went straight across the plaza into the avenue where the one theater stood. The place was vacant at this hour of the morning, and quiet, except for a peon patiently sweeping the wide steps at the main entrance.

Glasgow looked at it a long time, his white face a little gray, now, about the tight lips and the square jaws. He walked down the narrow little *calle* at the side of the big building where the stage entrance opened like a tunnel. He measured the distance from that to the street, to the front door where the people would enter, to the curb where Doña Antonia's fat white horses usually stopped, then he thrust his hand into his pocket.

He had fallen into the habit of carrying his automatic with him in Mexico; he had been shot at once in the hills by bandits, and there had been other occasions when the feel of it was like the hand of a friend. It was like that now, like a trump card in the hands of a gambler, or the last round of ammunition in the belt of a soldier facing his foe.

Glasgow walked slowly back to the plaza and found a vacant bench there under a pecan tree. He took his pipe out of his pocket and found it half filled. He had stopped filling it when Mariana told him the story. He finished filling it now, and lit it, smoking quietly. His mind was made up.

Some children near him were playing *El Diablo y la Monja*—the Devil and the Nun. A little dark girl, slim as a reed, was the devil, testing the locked hands of the

children in the ring around the nun, crying out: "What is this? What is this?" Glasgow looked on grimly.

In a moment the devil found a barricade that was only of straw, and broke through, pursuing the nun. Glasgow laughed bitterly. Was Consuelo's faith only a straw barricade that the devil could break? Doubt is—in the words of the poet—"devil born!"

Glasgow clenched his teeth on his pipe, no longer watching the children. From his seat on the bench he could see both doors of the theater—and the little lantern that hung on the chain across the entrance of the Street of Broken Hearts.

III

THE white sunshine, slipping down the walls of the Mendoza house, had just reached the great pink and purple blooms of the passion flower that Consuelo had trained about one of the white pillars of the corridor. When it reached the jars full of Tía Antonia's carnations, it would be time for the *almuerzo*, a light repast of chocolate, bread, and eggs, served between the early breakfast and the midday dinner, and sure to awaken Tía Antonia from her slumber in the wicker chair in a remote corner of the big *patio*.

Consuelo wished for it fervently. If it would only come and rouse the fat old duenna, she would have less trouble in her verbal fencing with Cesar Rojas, for it was like that, like a sham duel, to keep on friendly terms with him, and yet to keep him at arm's length.

Besides, she had had to lie to him this morning, and there was something deep down in Consuelo's nature that hated to lie, even to save her own life—or another's. It might have been fundamental honesty, or the pride that came to her with her Castilian blood, but she hated it, and she had had to do it for her own sake—and for Glasgow's.

"I saw a man at that window last night—and a woman was there," Don Cesar told her in a hot undertone as soon as he was sure that Doña Antonia was asleep.

"Teresa, old Anica's granddaughter, no doubt," Consuelo said, glibly. "She's in love with Diego, the water carrier, and she's here with Anica nearly every night."

"The man was taller than Diego," Don Cesar replied. "He walked like that gringo, Glasgow; I've seen him on the plaza."

Consuelo lit a cigarette with firm white fingers, tendering a match to Don Cesar.

"All gringos walk alike," she said sweetly.

Don Cesar sat at the little teakwood table, opposite to her, and under the shade of the pepper tree in the center of the *patio*. He leaned over, now, and suddenly caught her by the wrist.

"Consuelo, were you at the window?"

She did not flinch, although his grip on her slender wrist hurt. She looked back into his eyes, and her own lids drooped, half hiding the flame in them.

"You will let go of my wrist, Cesar!"

"Consuelo, I'm going to marry you," Don Cesar went on, hoarsely. "Your aunt and I have the papers signed. If you let the gringo kiss you at the window—I—"

"You will let go of my wrist!" Consuelo announced, and she pushed the red tip of her cigarette against his fingers.

Don Cesar jumped, and the girl wrenched her arm out of his grip, her eyes flashing. Then she laughed.

"Cesar, you're a fool," she said. "You'll never make any woman love you!"

"You'll find I'm no fool if that was the gringo last night," Don Cesar retorted. "Was it?"

"*Caramba!* Do you think I would tell you?" she laughed again, wickedly. "Why should I tell you, Cesar?"

He scowled at her. "*Madre de Dios*, if I were sure—I would—" He did not finish, but she knew that he would kill her.

Even then her hands did not shake as she took the chain of jade beads from her neck and wound them around her arm like a bracelet. She looked at him across the little table, with her level eyes, like one man looking at another. He might have been a chair, for all the emotion she showed.

"Why should I tell you, Cesar Rojas?"

"Because you're going to be my wife. A wife must tell her husband the truth!"

"Must?" repeated the girl, with proud lips. "*Must?*"

He nodded. "A wife should confide in the husband who adores her, shouldn't she?"

"Meaning you?" Consuelo laughed scornfully. "You would be a tyrant, Cesar!"

He shook his head, his glowing eyes on her lovely, scornful face. "Rather a slave, my beloved!"

She laughed again, but this time there was a tremulous note in her laughter. She had heard some one at the outer door. She summoned all her strength and arose gracefully from the little table, smiling across at Don Cesar.

"That's a pretty speech," she said, lightly, "but—I don't believe it. I know you, Cesar!"

"Listen, Consuelo! I swear it, I—" He was on his feet, too, trying to reach her hand across the little table, but she evaded him.

"Wait, I'll tell Anica to make you a cup of chocolate; it is nearly time for the *almuerzo*." As she spoke she avoided his outstretched hand, and slipped out into the vestibule and caught old Tomaso by the arm.

"Listen!" she whispered. "That's Señor Glasgow—I know it! Tell him I've gone to the theater—for Heaven's sake don't let him in here!" She half shook old Tomaso. "Listen! Do what I say; it's life or death, Tomaso; do anything, say anything; lie, if need be!"

The old porter nodded, and Consuelo went back into the *patio*. The sweetness of the flowers almost sickened her; her heart was beating in her throat.

Don Cesar had risen and was standing by the table, a flush on his face. Like Don Santos Ortega, Cesar was something of a silken dandy, graceful and meticulous in dress, a man who studied the fashions; but there was a deadly light in his long gray eyes, and a deadly grimness about his close-shut lips.

He was thinking, and he lifted his eyes heavily and studied Consuelo. The girl's beauty was like a flame in the shadowed *patio*, it caught at his breath; there was a luster and a glory about her.

Cesar Rojas saw this, and his Castilian pride was stirred. She would make him the sort of wife a man would fight for.

He had arranged all the routine details with Tia Antonia; details that were purely mercenary, and therefore effective with the fat aunt. The girl was already in the net!

"Consuelo," he said softly, "all the papers are signed. You are to be my wife!"

"I haven't signed them," the girl replied coolly, defiantly. "Why should I marry you, Cesar?"

"The best reason is the strongest, Consuelo; because—I want you! But there are other reasons—many of them. Lis-

ten!" He leaned across the table again, looking at her, his handsome face suddenly flushed with emotion, his eyes flashing. "Consuelo, if all goes well, I will be—some day—President of Mexico."

She laughed provokingly. "If all goes well, I will be, some day—the greatest prima donna in the world!" she mocked.

He struck the table lightly with a hand as slender and delicate as a woman's. "I've got three thousand men up in the mountains now, Consuelo, and I'll have ten thousand soon. I'm going to trap that fool, Santos Ortega, and his Federals. He's down at the Salazar hacienda—cooling his heels! I can wipe out his whole command, and there'll be a revolution that will shake all Mexico, and—when it's over—I'll be at the head of things. A turn of the hand, then, and—" He stopped, smiling at her, his glance eloquent.

He had a pale olive skin, with his long gray eyes, and the blood of old Castile flowed undiluted in his veins. There was something more than a touch of Spanish pride here; there was also a touch of fierce Spanish cruelty, and he showed it for an instant now in his smile.

"I can give you a great name, and the place I'll win for you—with my army behind me. But—if you will not take them—" Suddenly he lifted the table aside and caught her by both wrists, looking deep into her eyes. "If you will not marry me, if you refuse my name and my place in the sun, then—then I warn you." His voice was low, the tone of it was deadly, because it was so quiet. "I warn you, Consuelo, I'll take you, anyhow!"

She defied him. "You could not!" she declared.

"Could not?" He laughed fiercely. "You forget! In war a soldier seizes his prize; I'm going to make war!"

The girl swung back from him, struggling. "Let go of my wrists, Cesar!" she panted.

The blood had run out of her face and out of her lips; the rouge stood in bright patches on her cheeks. She was furious. "Because I'm a dancer, an actress, you dare to talk to me like this! You dare—but I'll never marry you, never! You can kill me if you want to, but you'll never get me!"

He held her wrists as in a vise. "Listen! I know it's that gringo, I—" Abruptly he flung her wrists from him and folded his

arms. "Some day—when you get me mad with love, Consuelo, I'll kill you both—you and the gringo!"

"You can kill me," Consuelo flashed back at him, shaking from head to foot with sheer rage. "I can tell you, now, Cesar, before I'd marry a man like you—I'd kill myself!"

Her face, aflame with anger, was beautiful, her eyes dilated, her nostrils quivered, her lips were red as the flame of her poppies. Suddenly Don Cesar caught her in his arms and kissed her. The girl struck him in the face, and the edge of her ring drew blood on his lip.

They had talked in low voices, struggled silently; but now, suddenly, she screamed. "Tía Antonia!"

The fat duenna awoke, and Cesar released Consuelo. The girl, reeling back against a pillar of the corridor, gasped for breath.

Doña Antonia was trying to rise from her chair.

"What is it, Consuelo?" she sputtered. "*Madre de Dios*, what is it? I can't get up—my foot's asleep!"

"It is nothing, *señora*," Cesar said, reassuringly. "Consuelo saw a mouse—" But to the girl, and his face was white now—white to the lip that was bleeding—he muttered: "You've struck me, and now I'm determined that no man shall steal you from me and live, Consuelo!"

"A mouse?" Doña Antonia interrupted him loudly, feeling the marble tiles with her cane, struggling to arise and sitting down again heavily, fat and breathless. "Help me up, Consuelo. I tell you my foot's asleep! Where's that mouse?"

"In a trap, *señora*," Don Cesar replied, flashing a glance at Consuelo's flushed face. "Permit me to help you, Doña Antonia." He came over to offer his arm, graceful and gracious.

The old woman, who admired his handsome face and his suave voice, leaned on his arm as she moved to the table.

"Consuelo, tell that idiot, Tomaso, to bring in the chocolate," she said, peevishly. "Where's Teresa?"

"Teresa's in love," Don Cesar said, suavely. "Last night her lover was kissing her through the bars of your front window, *señora*."

"My window?" Doña Antonia stopped short, gasping. "The hussy!" She turned and shook her cane at Tomaso, who had

appeared, bearing a tray laden with the hot chocolate and eggs and sugar bread. "Tomaso, send Anica here instantly!"

As she spoke she collapsed into a chair beside the table where Tomaso had set his tray. Her feet, coaxed into high-heeled slippers too small for her, tortured her. She stared at her niece, fretfully!

"Sit down, Consuelo, you hover like a pigeon looking for corn!"

Don Cesar drew forward a chair, smiling at the girl, his eyes sparkling. His mouse was in the trap!

"Sit down, Consuelo, I'm perishing for that cup of hot chocolate!"

Consuelo flashed defiance at him from under her long lashes.

"Tía Antonia, give Cesar some chocolate," she said, languidly. "I'm too tired to stir a finger."

Doña Antonia, who was greedy, and liked to be served quickly, looked up in surprise. Then the two faces, the girl's flushed with anger and the man's white, now, and watchful and half triumphant, caught the old woman's eye.

She was quick-witted. In an instant she divined trouble between them; but what was the trouble? She did not know; she must have dozed off. Some quarrel, of course!

She put out a fat, beringed hand to reach for the chocolate pot, trying to think; but at that moment Anica appeared, and she remembered the hussy at her front window.

Anica's face was worried into a dozen new puckers. She curtsied, her voluminous petticoats spreading like the ruffles of a guest room pincushion.

Doña Antonia set down the hot chocolate, and stared at her freezingly.

"Anica, I've just heard that a man was kissing Teresa through the bars of my front window last night. The baggage must be taught a lesson. If you, her grandmother, can't do it, I will!"

The old woman stared, open mouthed, then she whimpered.

"*Madre de Dios*, Doña Antonia, some one has told you a lie! Teresa is at home with her mother these two days—sick of a fever."

"At home? What do you mean? It can't be so—" Doña Antonia was, for the moment, nonplused.

"It is so, Doña Antonia! *Madre de Dios*, she's so ill they've sent for the pa-

dre—" Anica sniffed, crossing herself. "It is thought she may die!"

"That being so, she couldn't have been at your window, *señora*," Don Cesar interposed suavely. "Doubtless it was a mistake; some one else—perhaps Consuelo can tell us—" He turned, his dark gray eyes veiled by the white lids, and looked at Consuelo's flushed face.

Anica snatched at this straw. "*Madre de Dios, señor!* Teresa's a good girl; she kisses no man at the window!" she cried, shrilly. "I will swear to that, Doña Antonia, on the Cross!"

Tía Antonia, looking again from one to the other, suddenly saw the light. She tapped on the table with her fat forefinger, staring hard at her cook.

"That's enough, you can go, Anica," she said severely; "and next time you kiss Tomaso through the bars of my front window, I shall discharge you!"

"*Madre de Dios*, me kiss—" Anica stared, her mouth dropping open, her old wrinkled face turning yellow with sheer amazement.

"You may go," Doña Antonia repeated sharply, waving her cane.

"But, *señora*—"

"Go!" Doña Antonia fairly screamed at her.

Don Cesar, watching the scene, laughed silently, then he turned to Consuelo, and there was a flash in his eyes like the flash of drawn steel.

"Now I know!" he said softly, under cover of Anica's sobbing retreat. "It was the gringo, and to-night—I shall kill him!"

IV

"TO-NIGHT—I shall kill him!"

The words rang in Consuelo's ears—the words and the voice that had uttered them, the cruel, suave voice! She had got away from Don Cesar, away from fat old Tía Antonia, who was, she knew, waiting to score her for flirting at the window. She had been driven to the theater in a hired carriage, so that Glasgow would not recognize her until it was too late to detain her. Breathless and pale, she reached her dressing room, so wan that her maid brought more rouge for her make-up.

"You're too white to-night, *niña* Consuelo," she said, anxiously. "Look how pale you are! A bit more color for the footlights, a touch more on the lips, too!"

Consuelo was indifferent, she did not

even glance at the mirror, she felt suffocated. She knew that both men would be in the theater, both would go out of it to wait for her—and one of them would be dead before morning!

For an instant she pressed her hands over her eyes, trying to shut out the sight. She knew so well how it would be. Cesar was so quick with his gun, and Glasgow would not even suspect until it was too late!

A duel? Mother of God—a murder, no less! Glasgow, the American, trusting to his big fists; Cesar, the dandy, in jealous fury, shooting him down; the crowd, the police, the quick sympathy with the young aristocrat avenging an imaginary wrong, the common hatred of the gringo—Oh, Cesar would get off so easily!

Her hands fell from her face, but the touch had rubbed off some of the make-up, and the patient maid supplied more, a touch here, a touch there.

"Your eyes are too sad to-night, *niña* Consuelo! A bit of crayon here—to darken the lashes, eh?"

Consuelo arose slowly to her feet, a beautiful creature in the costume of the opera. A black, filmy lace sheathed her slenderness like the calyx of a flower, revealing her graceful limbs and her high arched Spanish feet in their dancing shoes.

Around her bare white shoulders floated her black *chal*, and the light caught on the blood red of its poppies. A high Spanish comb looped up her dark hair, and a scarlet poppy nestled beside it.

Her cheeks, and her lips, made up for the footlights, were aflame with rouge, but the shadows under her eyes were the shadows of the terror that lurked in her heart.

"To-night I shall kill him!"

That terrible threat rang in her ears to the exclusion of the clamor of her reception. She knew that the house arose for her, and there were loud cries of "*La Amapola!*"

She heard the clapping of hands, a flower fell at her feet, and she walked on it, smiling. And smilingly she began to dance, but there was a throbbing in her ears that deafened her, and once it seemed to her as if the sea of faces out there wavered up and down, and grinned, mocking her—gargoyles, hideous death's heads!

Yet she sang, and her voice soared, sweet and clear and haunting, and her lithe figure swung and swayed as she danced

the dance of death! For she saw both men there in front of her: Don Cesar, suave, handsome, smiling, his gray eyes on her mockingly; Glasgow, big, earnest, frowning, his gaze following her, questioning her. Both there, and one of them would be dead before daybreak!

Mother of God—what could she do?

The lie she had told to Don Cesar had betrayed her. She might have known it; he was too clever, too daring, for any girl to play with, and she had played with him; the coquette in her had defeated her.

Tia Antonia had been a fool to lie about old Anica. Afterward, of course, the fat old aunt had called her own niece names, not politely, but acidly, for she was afraid of losing such a good match as Don Cesar Rojas.

Now Cesar knew that Consuelo had permitted the gringo to kiss her through the iron bars of the window, and Consuelo was not a girl who let men kiss her. She had guarded against it so well, she had fought her way so well, that, *bailarina* though she was, men knew that Consuelo Cordoba was of good blood and held herself high.

Don Cesar would have treated her lightly enough had he thought her like the others—those girls who sang in the chorus and went out with the bullfighters, or danced the *jarabe* in the little cotton booths on the plaza at *fiestas*. But Cesar knew better; therefore he would go out and shoot a man in cold blood for daring to kiss her!

Knowing it, looking down at the upturned faces—like white patches in the dusk of the big auditorium—Consuelo danced and sang through the first act, halfway through the second, and then her brain cleared.

The look in Glasgow's eyes was the look of a man who is gravely angry. She did not know why. Twice she had glanced at him deliberately, twice she had tried to draw his eyes to hers, and each time she had felt as if a sword had been thrust into her heart.

He was angry; she saw it. She remembered that she had sent him away. Had he, too, guessed that it was a lie? Fate had caught her; she was, indeed, the mouse in the trap!

Glasgow's face must not look like that, not even with Cesar's eyes on her. Why, she loved him, she had kissed him. How dared he look like that?

In the interval between the acts, that little moment to think, the girl ran to her dressing room and searched for a scrap of paper. She found a torn envelope; on it Glasgow had written in pencil the English names of some familiar flowers, trying to teach her more English.

It was a business envelope, with the address of the firm in New York that employed Glasgow as its agent; but the letter had been a personal one from the junior partner, who had written the address himself, a scrawly, easy handwriting, that looked like spider tracks more than anything else.

Consuelo rubbed out the penciled names of the flowers, and, on her knees, behind the locked door, wrote on the envelope, copying the spider tracks as closely as she could. Then, going back stage, she called one of the boys who ran errands for the actors.

When the curtain arose on the last act, she went out to sing, her lips white under their rouge. It was only a chance, a mere chance; would she succeed? If she didn't succeed—*Madre de Dios!*—but she must succeed.

Glasgow, who had waited in vain to see her at the stage entrance before the performance, was waiting now for the long opera to end. Across the theater he saw Don Cesar, and noted that his eyes were on Consuelo.

Cesar had the look of a man who has won, and Glasgow saw it. It filled him with a cold fury, yet he knew well enough that in a fight with a Mexican don the life of a gringo would not be worth a *peso*. The crowd would see to that!

Nevertheless, Glasgow longed exceedingly to slap the dandy's handsome face. Meanwhile he sat quite still, watching Consuelo, waiting for an exchange of glances between the two, seeing no one else on the stage, aware of the flicker of lights and the voices, finally seeing only her face and the flame of her poppies, for the madness had him—the madness of Spanish love!

"When it is over she shall tell me the truth," he told himself grimly. "If she has lied to me—"

A boy came softly down the aisle and touched him.

"A letter, *señor!*"

Glasgow took the old envelope and stared at it. He did not remember that

moment when he had written English names of flowers on an old envelope, but he knew the firm address, and the writing under it. He had opened that very letter himself.

Some one, no doubt, was at his house now, had picked this envelope up and scrawled a message on it—for want of a better piece of paper. Bewildered, he read the message indistinctly written in pencil:

Came down here to see you at once. Please return to your house immediately, it's important.
PAUL GUTERHEIM.

This was the junior member of the firm, and an old pal; but Glasgow happened to know that Paul was in New York. He had wired to him there yesterday about the price of Mexican pears. Between that wire and to-night he could not have reached Mexico—even by airplane.

Glasgow looked for the boy, but no one was in the aisle. The house was in semi-darkness, the stage ablaze. Consuelo had made an exit for the moment. A fat tenor was singing a solo.

Glasgow thrust the envelope in his pocket, arose quietly from his seat, and went out. By no powers of reasoning could he connect the note on the envelope with Paul Guterheim; neither did he connect it, at the moment, with Consuelo.

But some one had been in his house in his absence, and had had access to his letters, and that some one was summoning him back to the house. He had a sudden thrill of hope, but a glance killed it. Don Cesar was still in his seat.

Nevertheless, there was a mystery in the summons; it might lead to a whack at that dandy yet. He could not afford to let it go unheeded, but reluctantly he made his way out.

He hated to leave the theater; he had sat there waiting for the moment when the curtain fell, and "La Amapola" took her last curtain call. He had meant to take her out on the plaza under the big pecan tree that she loved, and make her tell him the truth about Mariana's story—the truth about Don Cesar.

Now he must wait. Well, he could afford to wait until to-morrow, no longer, for—if Consuelo had deceived him—that would be the end.

The night was dark, for the moon had not yet risen, and the smoky lamps in the side streets made little impression on the

darkness. Glasgow crossed the plaza and went through the Street of Broken Hearts.

He thought he saw signal lights flashing on the distant hills, and remembered Don Santos Ortega again. Perhaps, after all, he would pot his rebels!

Glasgow opened his own door and went into the little vestibule. There was only a dim lamp burning there, suspended in an iron bracket as it had been hung there fifty years ago. Another light flickered in the *patio*, but the rest of the place was utterly dark.

Old Mariana had gone to bed. There was no sign of any other living thing in the house, except a glowworm creeping slowly across the ancient brick pavement of the *patio*. The place was as silent as the grave, except for the echoes.

The note from Paul Guterheim was not only a hoax, then; it must be a practical joke, or a ruse to get him out of the theater and away from Consuelo! He took the envelope out of his pocket and examined it minutely under the lamp.

Then he remembered. There was the blur where the pencil marks had been rubbed out. It was the envelope he had given to Consuelo!

There were the words, faintly seen yet: *clavel*—a carnation, *amapola*—a poppy, *pasionaria*—passion flower, one of the *bailarina's* lessons in English. How charming she had been, trying to pronounce the words correctly, how exquisite she had looked!

Glasgow's hand clenched, crushing the envelope. Consuelo herself had sent him that fake message! Why?

His first impulse to rush back to the theater, perhaps in time to catch "La Amapola" in the midst of the last tumult of applause, gave way to another feeling—one of fierce revulsion.

Was the girl he had loved so madly like this? Was she an actress full of small tricks, a woman who could play fast and loose with a man and try to cover it with a lie?

It was unbelievable, yet here, in his hand, was a make-believe, a cheap trick, a falsehood so shallow that it could not even deceive a child! And the motive—what was it?

He went into the little room to the right of the front door, the room which is usually the office or den of the master of the house, and he lit the lamp he had bought

for his desk. In the glow of it the bare room, with its lofty ceiling and its windows barred on the street like a jail, with its old mahogany desk and its tall, high-backed Spanish chairs, appeared no longer familiar.

It looked to him like a set for a play, a close-up in the movies; there was nothing real about it; it was as make-believe as the palace on the stage to-night, as the rouge on Consuelo's lips and her cheeks. It all belonged to a life in which he had no place; it was part of the drama where he had been playing the fool!

He tossed the envelope down on his desk and, folding his arms on his breast, stood staring at it, thinking. It was a dark moment, because doubt is always dark; and doubt, when it enters the soul against love, is an emissary of darkness.

But not until that moment had William Glasgow known how deeply he loved this girl, this dancer, "the Poppy," a girl with a public nickname, a girl whom men toasted at the casino.

Had she played this cheap trick to get him out of the theater so that she might go home with her lover, undisturbed by his presence? Mariana's story of the betrothal night, or might not, be true; but this fraud, this falsehood, this forged letter, was unmistakable.

Glasgow struck his hand on his desk with a force that made the tall lamp sway and all but fall to the ground. He had been an idiot, a fool, a jest, no doubt, between the girl and her lover.

He set his teeth hard, opened his desk, and took out a photograph, the likeness of a fair haired American girl. The friendly eyes looked up at him faithfully, the frank lips smiled; how dependable she looked, how like home and the everyday things he understood!

He flicked a little dust from it, found the frame from which he had taken it two months ago, and replaced it on top of his desk, under the lamp, enshrined like a saint.

She was not beautiful like Consuelo, without her lure of sex, the blood red of the poppies, but honest and true, and wholly American, one of his own people! He knew where to find her, and what to expect in her welcome.

He did not go back to the theater; instead, he went into the *patio*, cut a fresh carnation from Mariana's plant, and put it

in a glass before the photograph. Then he took up his pipe and filled it, although his hand shook as he lit it. Like the picture, his old pipe was a true friend.

He sat down in a chair before the desk, and looked steadily at the girl in the photograph. He was trying to remember whether he had written to her last, or forgotten to answer her last letter.

It was a little awkward, that uncertainty, but Janet was a good girl, she would not quarrel about it; she would write a sensible reply to his letter, and probably say, "We'll talk it over when you come home."

Sensible and honest, that was Janet; and pretty, too, by Heaven! He had always liked a fair girl until this damned Spanish fever got into his blood!

He went out into the *patio* again. It was quiet there, and the moon was coming up. He began to walk to and fro, ordering his thoughts.

There was that confounded glowworm—he nearly stepped on it! Nothing else was there but the glowworm and the subtle perfume of flowers.

Old Mariana was a witch with flowers; all these peon women were. Look at the carnations! Nothing like them at home, except in some florist's window—at a ridiculous price.

He stopped to look at them; their spicy odor brought back other memories—memories of home. Over there Mariana had a pot of fuchsias in full bloom, too.

Beyond them—he stopped short. There were those blood-red poppies; he had brought them there himself because of the name that had been given to Consuelo Cordoba, Poppies—red, flaunting, magnificent.

He should never see one again without that dragging tug at his heart. Her flowers—poppies!

Glasgow clenched his pipe between his teeth and stooped, lifted the gray earthenware jar, and turned with it in his arms. He had remembered the inner *patio* where Mariana kept her chickens; the poppies would be out of sight there.

He went to the gate, opened it, and stooped to set the jar down on the earth, but, as he bent over, it fell from his arms and crashed to pieces, the bruised poppies trailing in the dust. The noise for a moment deafened his ears to another noise, softer, more insistent, a gentle tapping upon the street door.

He had been staring a full minute at the broken jar and the bruised poppies, when he finally heard the knock. He took the pipe out of his mouth and listened.

It was past midnight, and some one was knocking softly upon the panel of the little door. Glasgow crossed the vestibule quickly, drew back the bolts, and threw it open.

The night was still intensely dark in the shadows, and the street was poorly lighted. At first, with eyes dazzled from his own lamp, he saw nothing, then a figure took shape, and a woman emerged from the shadow.

She came in quickly, caught the door from his hand, and shut it behind her. As she did it her *chal* slipped from her head and her bare white shoulders and caught at her elbows.

Half laughing, half crying, she leaned against the door and panted for breath, her beautiful eyes on his, her face white under its rouge.

"Consuelo!"

"Bolt the door, *amigo*," she whispered. "I have something to tell you! Tomaso is waiting for me—but I may have been followed!"

V

MECHANICALLY, Glasgow fastened the door. A moment before he had been racked by cruel doubts of her, but now he saw her beautiful eyes full of fear, or something deeper than fear, and the very touch of her fingers as they met his on the latch of the door, the fragrance of her hair, of her poppy *chal*, tugged at his heartstrings. He turned, now, and dragged that envelope from his pocket.

"Look at this, Consuelo! Before you say a word, I want this explained. You sent it. Why?"

"Oh, that!" She put her hand to her throat as if she could not breathe. "I—I had to do it—to get you out of the theater. Cesar was going to kill you!"

"Piffle! Don't you think I can handle that dandy? You've got to tell me a better one than that, Consuelo! What's this I hear—that the papers are signed, and you're going to marry that fellow? Is it true?"

They were standing in the *patio*, and the dingy lamp showed her face white, except for the splash of carmine on her lips and the shadows under her great eyes.

"Who told you that the papers were signed?" she asked, slowly, in a low voice.

"Never mind! It seems to be a matter of common knowledge." Glasgow took a step forward, looking deep into her eyes. "Consuelo, have you been making a fool of the gringo?" he asked bluntly.

"Do you think I'd come here—at this hour—if I—" She faltered, then, with a poignant gesture, went on: "It is all Tia Antonia's doing; she and Cesar have signed some agreement. It is a matter of money, *amigo*, if—if she could—" The girl's bosom arose and fell stormily, and her eyes flashed. "If she could she would sell me—like a dog or a cat or a monkey!"

"Consuelo, you darling!" Glasgow would have caught her in his arms, but she held him off, her eyes wide.

"Wait until I tell you," she said. "You are fond of Don Santos Ortega, aren't you? *Sí*, I know! Then you must send him a warning. Cesar has his rebels up in the hills, two thousand men or more; he's raising an army, and he's going to trap Don Santos and his Federals at the Salazar hacienda."

"Trap Ortega and butcher him? Say, I'll go out and warn the old boy myself; I know how to reach him."

"No, no!" She caught at his arm and held to it. "Cesar has sworn to kill you; he'd get his chance, then; he'd have you shot as a spy—even—even if he kills me first!"

"Kills you? Why, what do you mean, Consuelo?"

Glasgow was bewildered. He saw the blood rush up in her cheeks, up to her dark hair.

"If Cesar finds out I've—I've been here to see you at this hour—alone—he'll—" She uttered a hysterical little laugh.

"And do you think that handsome devil's going to get a chance to kill you? What do you take me for? A dumb-bell?"

"Oh, you don't understand!" The girl's voice broke, her face, flushed and lovely, was half averted. "It's dreadful for a Mexican girl to come here alone—at night. Tia Antonia wouldn't let me in her house if she knew; truly, she wouldn't! As for Cesar—you see, there is this—this arrangement with Tia Antonia about some property if I marry Cesar. I haven't consented, I've never signed anything, but he's talked of it to his friends. He'd—he'd think I'd disgraced myself and disgraced him. He'd

shoot me—like that!" She flung her arm out with a quick gesture.

Glasgow thrust his hands into his pockets and began to pace to and fro; in his rage he couldn't stand still.

"I get you," he said, after a moment. "That fellow needs a good thrashing—and he's going to get it. As for you, you're a darling; but, Consuelo, you knew you could trust me. Say that to me, dearest!"

She lifted her beautiful eyes to his and smiled for the first time, radiantly.

"Always and always!" she said softly.

He caught her in his arms and held her close. Their lips met, and the fragrance of Mariana's flowers was to them the perfume of paradise.

Then the girl remembered.

"I must go! Tomaso is standing outside the door, watching; he'll take me home. No, you mustn't come! Tia Antonia would be horrified. Besides, I—" She looked up with a new fear in her eyes. "Promise me! Don't go out until noon to-morrow. At noon Cesar goes across the river, up into the hills to his rebels. If he meets you to-morrow before he goes he'll kill you. He'll find some excuse, he's quick as a flash—and—and no one would punish him here—he's a Rojas! Oh, you mustn't go out until—until it's safe!"

Glasgow laughed; he could not help it, although terror had brought her there at night to warn him.

"You darling!" He tried to keep the smile from his lips now. "Do you really think that this bravado could beat me? Forget it, dear. I'll take care of him before noon to-morrow."

She shook her head, clinging to him. "He doesn't use his fists," she said in a low voice. "He shoots to kill. He'll never let you get away—if he knew I was here now, he'd kill us both!"

"Would he?" Glasgow's jaws squared. "I don't like to boast, my dearest, but I don't think he would."

"Then you'd have to kill him," the girl said, her lips white under the paint. "And there'd be no hope for you, *amigo*!"

She held out her white hands, her eyes pleading; a tender creature, so unlike the gay, defiant *bailarina* that he caught his breath. "My beloved, don't you see? You're a gringo; if you killed Cesar Rojas, you wouldn't live—one hour!"

Glasgow, looking at her, beautiful and terror stricken in her pleading, suddenly

knew that she spoke the truth. He was "a gringo."

Don Cesar might kill him and get away with it, he probably could; but if he, Glasgow, killed a Rojas, even in self-defense, he should be a murderer, to be shot or hanged—no power on earth could save him. But not even that weakened his resolution to thrash Don Cesar.

"I won't kill him, Consuelo," he said, "but I'll give him a good beating."

The girl came across the *patio*, caught him by the lapels of his coat, and fairly shook him.

"You can't do it, you mustn't even try!" Her eyes were wide with terror. "I—you were both in the theater to-day. I wrote that note on the envelope to get you away. By this time Cesar has guessed that I fooled him in some way, and he's furious. I'm going to tell you the truth, *amigo*; when you were at the window—you remember? Cesar saw us there, he wasn't sure—but he came and tried to force the window open; the bars held him off. If he'd found me there, if he had been sure that we—we kissed each other between those bars—he would have killed me. Do you want him to kill me?"

"Look here, Consuelo," Glasgow said, grimly, "are you so afraid of that brute that you're going to give me up and marry him from sheer terror?"

"No, no!" She stamped her foot suddenly. Her eyes filled with tears. Her lovely face looked like a flower in the dim old *patio*, and the flame of her poppies was not deeper than the flame in her cheeks. "You're—you're so stupid!" she sobbed, choking.

Glasgow stared at her helplessly. She was Spanish, yes, and temperamental! How could he ever understand her? Then, seeing the wrath in her eyes, the tears on the long dark lashes, he swallowed hard.

"Let me pass!" cried Consuelo. "I want Tomaso. I'm—I'm going home!"

Glasgow seized her by the wrist.

"Great Scott, Consuelo, I know! It's this way, isn't it? To get you I've got to run away with you?"

She was dragging her wrist away, but at that she stopped, and the tears slipped down on the poppy *chal*.

"Of course—you've got to—" she answered. "Don't you see? Then—then—"

"When we're married, Don Cesar would have to stop gunning, eh?"

She nodded. "If we ran—far enough!"

Glasgow laughed exultantly. "You peach! Consuelo, let's do it now. Let's take old Tomaso—I'll rout out Mariana, too, and go and get a *padre* and get married, and send Don Cesar to the devil!"

"To-night? Oh, no, no!" She laughed faintly, her soft cheek against his shoulder now, her long lashes hiding the beauty and the witchery of her eyes. "I'm not dressed for—for my wedding!"

"Nonsense! Clothes don't matter—come on, Consuelo!"

She shook her head gravely this time. "We'll wait—Cesar goes to the hills tomorrow—then—"

"Look here," Glasgow said, soberly, "do you mean to tell me you're actually afraid that man would shoot you for breaking your aunt's trumped-up agreement with him?"

She nodded. "He would kill me."

"Gosh! A girl at home breaks an engagement and marries the other fellow when she wants to. Sometimes she doesn't stop to break it. She simply marries the other fellow, and lets it go at that!"

"How nice!" Consuelo said, then she added, thoughtfully: "But that isn't love, *querido*, not Spanish love!"

"Spanish love?" Glasgow smiled. "What would you do, Consuelo? What would the girl do—if the man flirted with another girl?"

Consuelo slipped out of his arms and began to twine her poppy *chal* about her head and shoulders. She had heard the clock strike one.

"Men don't flirt with other girls—if they really love one girl," she replied, simply. "What would I do? I'd scratch her eyes out, *querido*."

"You little wild cat!"

Consuelo opened her dark eyes wider; the rose had faded from her cheeks; she was pale, except for her painted lips.

"I love you," she said in a low voice, a flame kindling in the depths of those wonderful eyes. "I love you so much that if I thought you loved another girl I'd—I'd be like Don Cesar—I should want to kill you!"

Glasgow tried to take her in his arms again. He had no words, for the girl's look, her voice, humbled him. She was a little wild cat, yes; but what had he done to deserve a love like this?

"Consuelo!" he murmured.

She put him gently aside. "You will not go out now and—get killed, will you?" She smiled at him, tears in her eyes again. "For my sake, you won't go, *querido*!"

The Spanish term of endearment was sweet upon her lips.

"I think I'd do anything in the world for your sake," he replied soberly, "except play the coward!"

"If you love me," Consuelo said, "you will not go. If you do—how can we run away?"

"It might be awkward—if Cesar killed me, I admit it, or if I—killed him!"

She caught his arm with both hands.

"You mustn't!" she whispered. "I—oh, don't you see? I don't want any one killed for my sake—not any one!"

"I'll promise you this—I won't kill him," Glasgow said lightly; "I'll only knock him out."

She shook her head. "Listen—I must persuade you—what's this place?" She had come to the door of his den. "The room where you work?"

Suddenly Glasgow remembered Janet's photograph, with the votive flower, and he tried to keep the girl away from it.

"Sit down here in the *patio*, Consuelo," he said, hastily reaching for a chair. "The *patio* is full of flowers, and flowers are like you!"

But she had gone into his little office, and stood looking about her curiously. The sparse furniture, the desk, the American typewriter were strange to her.

"You do your dull business details here?" She sighed tenderly. "It's a chill place. There isn't a cheerful thing about this old house. There are—" She stopped suddenly. Her eyes had reached the photograph and the floral offering before it, like a flower at the shrine of a saint.

She stood still, staring at it.

Glasgow could feel the storm gathering, but he could not think of a word to say. He had told Consuelo that he had no female relatives at all, neither sisters nor cousins nor aunts. There was no way in the world to explain the picture—and the carnation was the most damning thing about it!

Manlike, he did the wrong thing. He tried to divert her from the picture, but he might as well have tried to dam Niagara with a log.

"Consuelo, we can be married to-morrow. There's no reason to wait—"

"I don't want to marry you," she said, in a low, tense voice. "I will not marry you!"

He was stunned. "You will not marry me?"

"No!" the girl cried, passionately, pointing a shaking finger at the photograph. "I know now—I saw it when I came in—you had broken the jar with my poppies in it; you did it on purpose! That—is the girl you love!"

"You're the girl I'm going to marry," Glasgow retorted flatly, hard-headed, determined, out of touch with the romance of the girl. To him it was no time for love-making; it was time for the serious business of marriage. Don Cesar should have no chance to interfere.

"This," said Consuelo, lifting the picture in a shaking hand, "is the girl you meant to marry before you saw me. Answer me, isn't that true?"

Glasgow waved it aside. "It doesn't matter about that, Consuelo; we're going to be married now!"

She was ablaze with color, the flame of it was in her cheeks, her throat, her forehead; her eyes sparkled.

"Answer me!" she cried, passionately. "You loved that girl. You've had her photograph here; you keep flowers before it, as I keep them before the picture of *Santa Maria de la Concepción*. You were going to marry her!"

"What difference does it make about any other girl?" Glasgow demanded hotly. "I'm going to marry you!"

"It—it makes this difference," Consuelo said, furiously. "This and this!" She tore the picture out of its frame, ripped it in two, threw the pieces down and trampled on them.

"Stop!" Glasgow's face blazed; he remembered the innocent girl whose face was being ground under another's heel. "You can't do that, Consuelo; she's a fine girl! You've no right to insult her picture—" He stooped to recover the fragments. "I won't have it!"

"No!" the girl cried fiercely. "You won't have it—because you love her; she's everything to you, and I—I am the *bailarina* with painted lips and blackened eyes—the woman who came to your door at night! *Madre de Dios*, and I risked even my good name when I came here to warn you—so Cesar, who loves me, would not kill you! Cesar would kill me for coming

here, Tía Antonia would cast me off, and I did it—for you!"

Glasgow had one piece of the picture in his hand; he straightened up, white faced, looking at her. She answered his look by grinding her heel down onto the other fragment that held the smiling face of the girl beyond the Rio Grande.

"I stamp upon her!" she said passionately. "Take her, if you will; take her—I—I hate you!"

Then she dragged her *chal* over her head and ran to the front door, tearing at the chain bolt with shaking hands.

"Consuelo, you're—you're mad!" he cried, trying to stop her. "Listen—I'm going with you, I—"

"You shall not!" she almost screamed at him. "I—I almost made you marry me—you'd tell her that! I—" She could not go on. She tore the door open and ran out into the night.

Glasgow tried to overtake her at once, but the street lamp had flickered out, and the street was utterly dark on its moonless side. He could only just discern two figures at the corner, going fast, and one of them he was sure was the squat figure of old Tomaso.

She was safe, then, and he stood still, bewildered. It had been like the rush of a hurricane, the sudden flame of a fire that scorched and seared. It was all madness, yet he knew—he might be a fool—but he was more helplessly in love with her than ever!

VI

It is said that the night brings counsel. Certainly Glasgow spent what was left of that night in thinking how mad he was to be so deeply in love with a little Spanish wild cat!

But even this serious contemplation of his own folly, accompanied by many smokes and much tramping up and down in the old *patio*, did not exorcise his demon. Even his anger at her destruction of poor Janet's innocent picture did not keep him from remembering Consuelo's flesh and blood loveliness, and the flash of love—Spanish love—in her eyes, the touch of her soft cheek on his, the tenderness of her hand upon his hair.

It was madness, this Spanish love, but it was like the passion flowers in the *patios*, the fragrance of the jasmines, intoxicatingly sweet, the spicy perfection of the car-

nations, the splendor of the skies at noon-day when the sun cast no shadows and a cement wall stood up like a piece of paper—white on both sides—while the fervor of that sun burned deep into the Spanish souls. In a moment, at a word, Consuelo's tenderness had leaped into a vehement flame of jealousy.

It had seemed intolerable to Glasgow then; but now—walking alone in the *patio*—it came back to him as only a complete assurance of her love. She loved him well enough to hate him!

He lifted the earthenware jar and put the poppies in another place, caressingly. It was daybreak, and the soft light slipped down into the *patio* and showed the moss upon the old well. Glasgow drew a long breath; his pipe had died out.

"The fat's in the fire," he mused, smiling grimly. "Mad or sane, I love her—so that's that!"

As for Cesar Rojas? Glasgow's mind flashed back to Don Santos. He must warn him; he was out at the Salazar hacienda, unprepared, perhaps, for an assault from Cesar's numbers.

Very likely he did not even know that Cesar was to lead the revolt. These things worked underground, then suddenly somebody commenced to shoot up somebody else, and a new revolution was started. Santos must be warned.

Then he remembered the complete unreliability of messengers, and that the rivers were swollen. It would be necessary to cross one where the last group of rebels had destroyed the bridge; Don Santos had mentioned this—with picturesque swear words.

Don Cesar would have to cross it, too, to get at Santos Ortega, and if Cesar could cross, so could Glasgow. He would get his breakfast, and then find some one to row him across, and find him a horse on the other side.

Mariana, who had been awakened in the night by voices, and made her observations through the keyhole of her door in the inner *patio*, had her own opinion.

"The *bailarina* is a hussy," she told herself flatly, beating Glasgow's chocolate to a stiff froth; "but what would you? The girls now are all pink legs and bare arms; they would frighten their own grandmothers! And the gringo is a fool. Tomaso says she marries Don Cesar for his money!"

Glasgow, unaware of Mariana's attitude, took the chocolate patiently—although he would have preferred it thinner, with whipped cream on it—and went about his business.

It was so early that he met only the servants going to market, their voluminous petticoats fluttering in the breeze, black *rebozos* over heads and shoulders, and baskets on their arms. It was a golden morning, except for a mist over the river, and a curl of bluish cloud on the hilltops outside the town.

The market place was full of chattering peons, and the odor of fresh roasted peanuts and hot *tamales*. Glasgow found a peon, or rather the peon came to him, offering rabbits for sale.

The man had just rowed across the river, he said, to bring the rabbits to market. He readily agreed to row Glasgow back with him, and to find a horse on the other side.

"Pedro Carnero has one, *señor*—the best; he hides him from the soldiers in the hills," the rabbit man whispered hoarsely; "but if the *señor* pays—"

The *señor* assured him that he would pay; in fact, some money changed hands immediately, and the bargain was closed. But the peon would not go back for an hour or so, and Glasgow walked down to the river front and stood there, observing the opposite bank for signs of Cesar's rebels.

It was, after all, a small matter to him—only another revolution; but he was hotly determined that Don Cesar should not succeed. It seemed to him that success in this matter meant success with Consuelo.

Wouldn't any girl prefer a dashing hero, striking for high place and power, to a stodgy gringo, interested only in the prices of exported fruits? The picturesque aspect of Don Cesar's venture, the dash with which he intended to carry it on, sent the blood into Glasgow's face.

"Darn him, he's a regular movie hero!" he muttered.

Then, quite suddenly, he saw something besides the magnificent verdure of the hills on the opposite shore, and the white dash of the waterfall that sparkled there in the sunlight. A flat-bottomed boat, the Mexican *barca*, was being propelled across, against the current, and in it was a beautiful black horse with the high Mexican saddle, held by a ragged peon. Two more

peons poled the boat, and beside the horse stood a graceful figure, a military cloak thrown across the shoulder, a military hat worn rakishly, the flash of silver spurs on the heels, and the gleam of a pistol at the belt.

"Don Cesar Rojas, as I'm a sinner!" Glasgow mentally exclaimed, as he brought his field glasses into use.

It was Don Cesar, beyond a doubt, going to summon his rebels to capture Ortega and his small Federal force at the hacienda. Glasgow would be two hours late, and he had no horse to compete with that splendid black.

Besides, he would have to ride into a hornets' nest; for, if Cesar's command was in the hills opposite, the only way to the Salazar hacienda lay straight through the rebel lines, and Don Cesar had sworn to kill him!

"Lucky he doesn't know I'm coming after him so soon!" Glasgow thought with a grin, that was of the lips only. He knew now that it was a serious matter to get past the rebel outposts, and to warn Don Santos in time. "Darn it, I'm not scared. I'll warn old Santos, anyway!"

Glasgow had recalled his thought of a man against the wall facing the firing squad.

"The damned little rat might not even stop at that!" he muttered. "Or he'd even use a rope and the nearest tree."

In any case, he must go quickly; he might not come back as quickly, and there was yet an hour to wait for the rabbit peon. In that hour he must find Consuelo.

He had forgiven her by now for the torn photograph. On second thought, it touched him to the heart. She must love him to be jealous, and her love was something to set a man mad.

If Consuelo really loved him, he could count the rest of the world well lost! The thought of it went to his head like new wine. She loved him well enough to be jealous of him; nothing else mattered. He must see her, and set it all straight about poor Janet before he went to warn Don Santos. Then, if anything happened—but nothing would happen, except that he thrashed that darned little dandy!

He knew that Consuelo would not see him if he went to the house. He had had illuminating glimpses of Spanish pride before this; she would send him away with a snub administered through old Tomaso.

No, he must see the girl herself—not hampered by Tia Antonia, Cesar's ally. There was another way, he knew, because they had tried it before in those happy hours when they were both in love, and happy in its first discovery.

She usually went over to the theater at this time, and she would be almost certain to go to-day, for there was a new opera to be sung that night. There would be some rehearsing.

Glasgow had only to sit under the big pecan tree on the plaza and watch the Street of Broken Hearts. To-day he did not like that name, it pierced him like a sword thrust—the Street of Broken Hearts!

He tried to shake the impression off, to be what he was, in fact, a common sensed American. But this place, the climate, the strange wild romance of it, the elemental passions flaring up, the lure of Spanish voices, of Spanish songs, of Spanish love—that hot, consuming flame—had gone to his brain.

He began to walk up and down, took out his old pipe and filled it, and started to smoke. He wanted to do commonplace things, to be back in the workaday world, where he felt at home.

The moment he saw Consuelo he would set it all straight. The quarrel was a foolish thing; he would forget it.

He should take the girl out of her surroundings, away from these fevered situations, and all would go well. He was sure of it as he tramped up and down and smoked. There's comfort in an old pipe; it tasted of a thousand smokes.

Then he saw her coming. She was on foot, in her tiny, high heeled French shoes, approaching lightly over the dirty cobblestones in the Street of Broken Hearts.

She did not wear black to-day; her dress had the flame of the poppies on her *chal*; it was like a gorgeous silken poppy. Her hair was looped high with a silver comb; big silver earrings dangled from her little ears; her face was aflame with rouge, her lips as red as her poppies—a vivid, arresting creature!

On one side walked Pinto, the manager of the opera company, a fat, middle-aged man with a flower in his buttonhole. On the other side was old Don Esteban Calderon, a shriveled dandy, who still leered at the pretty girls on the plaza, and had an eye for neat ankles, although he was also a magistrate and a town dignitary.

To-day he flourished a little malacca cane, and pranced beside the greatest *bailarina* in all Mexico, while her manager scowled across at him and called him names under his breath.

Consuelo, sharing smiles between them, laughed, her dark eyes flashing. She had seen Glasgow, but she would not look at him.

She talked and laughed with old Don Esteban. So perfectly could she act indifference that Glasgow thought she did not see him.

He walked across a bit of turf and stood squarely in their path. Pinto knew him, and shook hands, presenting him to Don Esteban.

Glasgow ignored their generalities, and said that he was going away immediately, and wanted a word with the *señorita* before he went.

The two older men, thinking him, no doubt, a barbarian, moved on, talking volubly and waving their canes.

Glasgow faced Consuelo, and knew suddenly that there was no hope of reconciliation. Things that had seemed trivial and of no moment to him, loomed up now as insuperable barriers between them. With a look, with the slightest gesture of withdrawal, she seemed to put him in the wrong, and he felt like a miserable booby before an angry princess.

Consuelo was white under her rouge, her eyes had a flame in them, her lips were drawn in a tight line. She stood still, confronting him, haughty and a little scornful. She did not speak. She waited.

Glasgow's face burned, and his heart burned within him, too. He felt incredibly awkward; he was tongue-tied.

For the life of him he could not tell what he had meant to say to her. He had planned so many things to say—when she should fling herself into his arms and weep! But she was not going to fling herself into his arms; she was cool and disdainful. He felt his throat tighten.

"I wanted to bid you good-by," he said stiffly. "I'm going to the Salazar hacienda to warn Don Santos of the rebels. I may be gone some days—perhaps longer—"

"It's a fine day for the journey, *señor*," Consuelo replied, politely; "but the river's wide. Which road shall you take, the upper or the lower one by the river?"

"The road that takes me nearest to the rebels," Glasgow answered grimly, "so I

may carry news of them to Santos and his Federals."

Consuelo lifted her chin, but her long lashes veiled her eyes.

"In doing that, *señor*, you become a—spy!"

"To be shot as a spy by your friend Don Cesar? You forget that I'm an American citizen. He'd hesitate, I think." Glasgow laughed harshly. "I see that I'm wasting my time. You do not wish to see me!"

"*Señor*, I'm desolated that you should think me so discourteous," Consuelo replied sweetly.

"Oh, damn!" Glasgow exclaimed, and turned on his heel.

He was furious. It seemed to him that the plaza was a blaze of white sunshine, and the sky a bit of copper.

Suddenly he hated the place—hated the pink and white stucco houses with their ironed windows, the churches with their streams of black veiled worshippers going in and out, the cries of the peons who were hawking *tamales* and peanuts and candy along the edges of the square below the market.

In a tumult of anger and outraged feeling, he strode across the plaza. He had almost reached the corner beside the casino when he heard light steps hurrying behind him, and Consuelo's voice.

"*Señor!*"

He turned, dazed. Consuelo had run after him! She was panting; the whiteness of her face showed under the rouge; her dark eyes were unfathomable.

"*Señor*, I—" She could not speak, but stood, gasping, her hands against her breast.

A rush of feeling carried Glasgow back to her.

"Consuelo, you—" He, too, was speechless, but his eyes searched her face.

She put out a shaking hand and laid it on his arm.

"Don't go," she said in a whisper. "*Madre de Dios*, don't go!"

His hand clasped hers upon his arm and found it cold. His eyes still searched hers.

"Do you mean that you want me to stay, Consuelo?" he asked her, hoarsely.

She did not seem even to hear him. A horrible fear had laid hold of her. She shook from head to foot, and her fingers dug into the flesh of his arm.

"Don't go to Don Santos—I—" She wet her dry lips and went on: "I was angry. I told Cesar that you were going—how you would go—He'll—he'll kill you!"

Glasgow's face changed; it seemed to freeze into a grim image. His figure stiffened, and his eyes hardened. He did not speak.

The girl, in the agony of her remorse, her fear that he would be killed by her jealousy, by the thing she had done in blind rage, cried out again.

"Don't go! I told Cesar!"

Glasgow stared at her a moment longer, a moment that might have been a century of torture, and his face whitened slowly to the lips, and twitched horribly. It might have been a gargoyle in its hideous distortion. Then he spoke one word slowly, distinctly, that she might be sure to understand it:

"Traitor!"

As he spoke, he struck her hand from his arm as he would have knocked off some noisome insect that had stung him. Then, with a gesture of utter scorn, he turned and left her.

VII

GLASGOW knew that Consuelo reeled back when he struck her hand from his arm, but he did not look at her again. He went straight down the narrow *calle* that led to the river.

At the foot of the street, his peon was already busy with his *chalupa*. Empty of its cargo of rabbits and vegetables, it was roomy enough for two, and Glasgow took his seat in it without a word. As silently the peon paddled out into the stream.

The banks on either side were cloaked in verdure. Opposite, the foothills arose abruptly, and behind them Glasgow could see the blue mountains against the sky—a sky like burnished brass. Of road or trail he saw nothing at all, but he knew that there were two roads, and beyond the hills the deep cut of the railroad which Santos must use for his troops.

An admirable place this for guerrilla warfare! The very stage for Cesar Rojas, to play up to his audience, the gaping town across the river—and Consuelo!

In midstream the storm within him calmed a little, and he spoke for the first time, morosely enough, trying to forget the girl.

"What's your name?" he asked his boatman.

The big peon stared at him an instant.

"Pancho," he replied.

"Not Villa, I suppose!" Glasgow laughed discordantly, and was amazed that he could laugh at all. "Pancho, where has Don Cesar Rojas got his rebels hidden?"

Pancho stared again. It was a long moment this time before he answered.

"How should I know, *señor*? *Madre de Dios*, a man mustn't know too much these days! If he does—" He touched his throat and grinned.

Glasgow pondered. If he went into the hornets' nest, he went after a warning. The little traitress, the damnable little traitress, had repented at the thought of bloodshed, doubtless, and warned him. Here was another warning from the peon.

But Glasgow was an American citizen, and he had a right to attend to his own business, although it might be said that his own business did not include the warning of Santos. His blood boiled at the thought of interference from Don Cesar. If he could only get at that dandy now!

His hands clenched, and then he laughed bitterly. Why fight with any man for a traitress?

He got out of the boat on the farther shore and stared about him indifferently. Life for him had definitely turned to gall and wormwood.

The place was wildly beautiful, and the nopal cacti took on fantastic shapes, but he saw only a road now. Pancho began to ascend it.

"Which way do we go?" Glasgow asked him sharply. "I want a horse. You bargained to let me have one."

"A step farther, *señor*." Pancho's voice was tired. "In the chaparral here is my horse, hidden from the soldiers."

In a little clearing stood a *choza*, one of the native grass roofed huts. The place was still, not even a bird twittered.

Pancho opened the door.

"If the *señor* will go inside and wait, I'll bring the horse," he said.

Glasgow, who had entered only a few native houses of this type, felt an impulse of curiosity. He saw that the floor was of earth; a water jar stood in a corner; a charcoal burner served for a cooking stove, and the place was dingy.

He stepped inside, with eyes still daz-

zled with the glorious sunlight. Instantly, before he had time to think, the door was clapped shut behind him, and a pair of strong arms closed around him like a vise, while another pair of hands clasped his ankles.

He was again betrayed! As he went down, struggling, he cursed madly, not the men who had seized him, but the woman who had betrayed him.

The struggle was a brief one. Overpowered and disarmed, Glasgow took it grimly.

"Don Cesar's men, I presume?" he said sharply, addressing one of the big peons who held him bound.

He got no answer. Silently and rather hurriedly, he thought, as if they were afraid, they marched him out of the hut and up the trail through a dense growth that hid the river completely from his sight.

He saw now that he was fairly inside the rebel lines. The place seemed to be alive with men, who looked at him either curiously or fiercely. As yet no officer appeared, but, as they climbed, he heard voices, and saw that they were coming into touch with the main body.

Glasgow used his eyes. If he got away—but he would not get away; he saw that in their faces. He was a gringo!

Then a sudden turn in the trail showed an open space, some native huts, and a group of officers moving away to leave a space before the chief—and the chief was Don Cesar Rojas.

Consuelo's face, her shaking hand upon his arm, came back to Glasgow as he saw this man to whom she had betrayed him, her lover! If he had been free at that moment—

He clenched his teeth and straightened himself. Then he heard an order given, and his guards moved forward.

Don Cesar was seated on a rock, his revolver across a knee, a cigarette between his fingers. Behind him, among the big nopal cacti, were grouped the men whom Glasgow took to be his officers, a motley enough group. In front of them the ground arose abruptly to a great bluff above the river, and it was carpeted with a dense low growth of the little prickly pear.

Glasgow's hands were tied behind him, and one of the peon guards stood on either side. He did not speak, but looked at Cesar, and his face set grimly; he was thinking of the woman. There was a long moment in which the two men measured

strength, and the American, tied and disarmed, was still unbeaten in that look.

"You're a spy, Glasgow," Don Cesar announced at last, lighting his cigarette. "You were taken inside our lines. I'm going to have you shot."

"You forget that I'm an American citizen," Glasgow said, wrathfully, "and it can't be done without trouble. You haven't even had a drumhead court-martial."

Don Cesar smiled. "It's not needed. I have certain information that you came up here as a spy for Santos Ortega. You'll be shot."

"If you shoot me, you'll regret it," Glasgow replied, as coolly as he could; "but I suppose I can't stop you from being a bandit!"

Don Cesar smiled maliciously. It was, after all, his hour!

"Take him out and shoot him at sundown," he commanded. "I'm going to give you two hours' grace," he added to his prisoner.

"Give me time to wire to my consul, then," Glasgow said. "You've no right to murder me."

Cesar waved his hand to the guards, two big ragged peons.

"Take the gringo away," he said briefly, "and shoot him an hour *before* sundown."

VIII

LEFT alone on the plaza, Consuelo Cordoba had reeled back when Bill Glasgow flung her hand from his arm. His very gesture was an insult, and the girl's white face suddenly burned with shame.

She leaned back against the tall trunk of the old pecan tree, and dug her finger nails deep into the bark. Her eyes closed, and for an instant the earth seemed to move under her feet; then she straightened herself, turned, and went slowly back, past the pond where the duck house stood among the reeds, past the slope where the children were again playing the game of *El Diablo y la Monja*, past the big pecan tree where Glasgow had kissed her poppy *chale*!

Old Don Esteban was waiting for her, waving his cane and talking volubly to Pinto, who kept saying to himself: "The old fool is a gas bag! Will he never be done with that story of the widow who fell in love with him? Psst, the old donkey!"

"I'd have you know, Carlos, that it was love at first sight with her, and she the most

beautiful woman in San Luis! Can you blame me if— Ah, here at last is the fair *bailarina!*"

Both men looked at her strangely. They had seen her run after a gringo, but Consuelo did not notice their attitude.

Her eyes were fixed on a strange procession which had just passed her. Two policemen led a wildly disheveled female prisoner between them, amid a crowd of her weeping and lamenting relatives, followed by a long train of ragged peons, male and female, of all ages, who at intervals joined in the melancholy howls.

Neither sight nor sounds were unusual. Prisoners are thus led to the jail, but Consuelo caught at Don Esteban's arm.

"What is that?" she demanded. "Who is that woman? I saw her eyes—her dreadful haunted eyes!"

"Oh, that!" Don Esteban waved his cane airily. "That's Carlotta Zapata, the woman who killed her husband. She has confessed, and they are taking her to jail. Hear her friends howling?"

"Why—did she kill him?" There was a catch in Consuelo's voice, and her hands went to her throat.

"She was jealous—another lady—" Don Esteban said lightly. "The old story!"

"A crime of jealousy, Consuelo," Pinto put in bluntly. "There was another woman; Carlotta found it out and killed her husband, Pedro Zapata, the water carrier. Now they think she's crazy. She can't sleep, and she keeps saying she's in a hell of her own making, and she only sees Pedro's dead face, and hears his voice way up in heaven, where she'll never go!"

"A hell of her own making?" Consuelo repeated with dry lips. "Yes, yes, she killed him—she did it herself!"

Pinto looked at her anxiously. What on earth ailed her? These dancers were the very devil for temperament—and a new opera was to be tried out at the *matinée*, too!

"She keeps harping on it being a hell, and she's making a hell for herself, of course," he grunted.

"Doubtless, doubtless! And, no doubt, Pedro thought it was like being in hell to live with her, eh?" Don Esteban cackled.

"Any woman who kills her husband undoubtedly goes to hell, Consuelo," he added earnestly.

Pinto broke in desperately. "The *matinée*, Consuelo, you need rest before it—"

Don Esteban offered his arm gallantly. "Permit me!"

They crossed the street to the stage entrance, and the old man held the swinging door back with his cane.

"You sing in a new rôle to-day, Consuelo, so Pinto tells me. I shall honor myself by sending you poppies," he added, with an air of sentiment.

The *bailarina* flung him a white hand to kiss, ignored Pinto's fuming anxiety over her haggard looks, and fled up the iron stairs to her dressing room.

Outside the door stood old Tomaso, patiently waiting for her orders. Consuelo opened her purse and gave him a handful of money.

"Get a boat, Tomaso, cross the river, and follow Señor Glasgow," she commanded. "See if he gets past Don Cesar's camp. Be sure of it before you come back, then come to me."

Tomaso took the money and hid it in his sash. He wore, when away from Tía Antonia's house, the white *calzones* and blouse of the peon, and the wide sash. As his squat figure vanished in the dim wings of the stage, Consuelo went into her dressing room and shut the door.

She was alone, and it lacked two hours of the time for the *matinée*, which would take two hours and a half. Before it was over, Tomaso should return with news.

If Glasgow was wise, if he went quietly along the lower road by the old canal, he might get past the danger zone. But Don Cesar knew that he was coming—she had told him!

Sitting there alone in her dressing room, she stared with dull eyes at all the little things that made up her stage life—the rouge, the perfumes, the costumes, trailing lace here, the glitter of a tinsel crown there, a tiara of fake diamonds on the old dressing table, the faded roses that had been showered upon her last night, the letters, many of them unopened, pouring out love and admiration, or begging alms of "La Amapola."

It was all unchanged, but she was like Carlotta Zapata. She was in hell, and she would never hear Glasgow's voice again—unless she heard it far off in heaven while she took her punishment. If he was killed up in the hills, she would be his murderer, as surely as Carlotta was the slayer of Pedro—and for a woman!

Not even Glasgow's cold fury when he

flung her hand away roused that demon in her that had made her tell Cesar that the gringo was going to warn Santos Ortega. It was the sight of that picture on his desk, with the flower before it, that had raised the fiend within her.

She had struck back madly, wildly, hating him, and now—she knew! She was like Carlotta, who was in hell!

She crouched there in her dressing room, staring in front of her in a dumb misery. Once only did the flame of her rage break out.

She saw the carnations that some one had sent to her. They were like the flower in front of the gringo girl's picture.

Consuelo arose, seized the drooping flowers, and flung them into the darkest corner. Even their spicy fragrance sickened her.

Then she rallied, and fought her horror down. It would not happen; it simply could not happen! Cesar would miss his prey; Glasgow would slip through his fingers and save Don Santos.

Consuelo cared nothing for Don Santos, for at heart she was a rebel; but if Glasgow slipped through, then she would not be like the murderess in the jail, and never sleep for hearing his voice in heaven—far above her hell!

It should not happen! She turned to dress for the *matinée*, and suddenly glimpsed her own face in her mirror. She gave a cry of dismay. Her eyes were like the eyes of Carlotta Zapata—the eyes of a woman who has killed!

She dashed water into them, called her maid, and was made up and crayoned about the lashes, but the look was still there!

Through that *matinée*, that endless *matinée*, Consuelo sang and danced. Her voice came lilting back into the wings, gay and lovely, her smile flashed.

"'La Amapola—La Amapola!'"

The crowded house rocked with applause. Flowers showered her; a scarlet poppy fell on her breast like a splash of blood, a red carnation broke at her feet, and she trod upon it, thinking of the gringo girl and Glasgow's offering before her shrine.

The *bailarina* had never been so beautiful, people said, in awed whispers to one another. They did not know that the make-up covered the haggard misery of her white face, that the poppies on her

breast were throbbing with the agony of her heart.

Consuelo danced and sang, but all the while she seemed to see in the dusk of the big theater the white face of Carlotta Zapata, and her wild eyes. Poor Carlotta, who had been cast into a hell of her own making!

The first act ended, the second act—curtain calls, flowers—masses of flowers, sickening her with their heavy perfume, meaningless! Pinto was rubbing his hands, delighted; a new piece had taken hold in a try out before night. It was a hit!

Consuelo, coming off, reeled against a side table, and gasped. The manager was in a fever.

"You're not going to be ill?" he exclaimed. "*Madre de Dios*, we have the place by the ears! You—Consuelo!"

She thrust him aside rudely, tears streaming down her face, and ran past him into the wings. She had seen Tomaso. The old man, dusty and tired, stood waiting.

"Tomaso!" Consuelo caught him by the arm and shook him. "Quick, quick—he got through?"

"Don Cesar has the *Americano*." Tomaso swallowed hard. "He—"

Consuelo leaned upon his shoulder, shaking. "Quick, quick! Tell me, Tomaso!" she gasped.

"Don Cesar's orders—he's to be shot an hour before sundown—*Madre de Dios, niña* Consuelo!"

She had fainted at his feet.

IX

"SHOOT him an hour *before* sundown!"

The words had not meant much to William Glasgow when he first heard them. They had not measured up to a half of the burning rage that consumed him.

Fool that he had been to fall into Cesar's trap, to let that darned little dandy catch him like a silly rabbit! The thing that possessed him was neither fear nor the chill of a death sentence; it was sheer rage. He yearned to get his hands free to maul Don Cesar.

"Gosh, to get him once—good and plenty—on the jaw!" he muttered to himself longingly. "Just once!"

He believed that one good knock-out blow would put the delicate young exquisite out of commission for all time. And this was the man whom Consuelo intended

to marry! The *bailarina* had made a fool of him; they had both made a fool of him, and now he could not strike back.

He knew he could get no message to the American consul, and he doubted if it would do any good if he did. By the time the usual deliberate formalities were over, he would be beyond help.

He was in a little adobe house. There were a few of these huts squatted about on the hillside, and Cesar had evidently taken possession of them.

A sentry paced outside the sashless window. Glasgow could see his figure pass and re-pass the open space outside. No use trying to bribe him; Glasgow had already tried it without result.

Either Cesar had a strong hold on his men, or this peon was above bribe taking. His reply to the prisoner's overtures had been brief and scornful.

"*Diablo!* I'm a man, *señor!*"

That reply brought it all home to Glasgow. He was to be shot an hour before sundown; there was no doubt about it, and no reasonable chance to escape.

They had searched him thoroughly, and taken away his pistol, his watch and chain, but had left him his pipe and tobacco bag. He filled the bowl, tamping the tobacco down with his thumb.

Then, after a brief search in his pockets, he found that they had also removed his match box. He went to the window and called to the sentry for a light.

The man hesitated, but produced a match and watched him light his pipe, evidently afraid he would fire the hut. As the match flared on the dark face under the big sombrero, Glasgow recognized it.

"Hello, you're not boating any more to-day, Pancho?"

Pancho grinned. "I was ordered to bring you over, *señor.*"

"Hell!" Glasgow's face darkened—the betrayal again!

Had "La Amapola" planned it all with Don Cesar, down to such details as a boat and boatman? Unconsciously he ceased to think of her as Consuelo, and she became the *bailarina*. She had betrayed him!

That thought took a deep hold upon him, and excluded all other thought of her, even of her tortured face under the pecan tree. That moment of her repentance did not count. Like a woman, she shrank from the actual killing, but his death would be at her door.

A love betrayed is poison in the blood. In that hour the Americano did not forgive. He hated the girl who had betrayed him, and his hatred was so fierce that it excluded every other feeling.

The memory of her arms about his neck, and her soft cheek against his, was only another poisoned dart. In his heart he cursed her. To him she was the living incarnation of every wicked woman, from Herodias down to Carlotta Zapata, the murderess, awaiting sentence in the town jail.

If, at the last moment, Glasgow wished to be absolved from his sins, he could not have forgiven Consuelo. She had betrayed him with a kiss!

But no *padre* arrived to shrive a gringo heretic, and the sun slipped westward, and a chill wind swept up from the river. They had taken his watch, and Glasgow had no notion of the time, except by watching the sun.

Far across the river he heard bells ringing faintly. When they rang for the Angelus, he would be dead!

Suddenly he recalled his own strange thoughts of the firing squad, and the man against the wall. It looked as if that fate was for him now!

He paced to and fro in the little hut, smoking his old pipe. Curiously enough, he did not want even the presence of a friend.

It seemed as if Consuelo's betrayal had killed something within him. He had no belief left for anybody. He would have sent a warning to Don Santos if he could, but it would have been more to deal a blow at Cesar than from any friendship he felt at that moment.

He would go to his death grimly, without a thought even of the Spanish dancing girl. Consuelo had killed the thought of any other woman as utterly as she had blackened her own image in his heart.

He was still pacing the floor, but his pipe had gone out, when the door opened, and a squad of soldiers came in. Pancho was at their head.

Glasgow put his cold pipe in his pocket. "What's up—the shooting?" he asked, steadily.

Pancho grinned.

"Orders, *señor*—hour before sundown."

"You're a damned rascal," Glasgow said. "I paid you, and you betrayed me. You're like the rest of your tribe!"

Pancho only half understood. In moments of excitement, Glasgow's Spanish was fragmentary, and his accent bad.

But these peons were adepts at the business of marching men to execution. They tied his hands behind his back after he knocked one man down, and hustled him out of the adobe hut.

The sun had already slipped down behind the mountain tops, but the sky was flooded with a light like golden wine. The slope of the hill, covered with a low cactus growth, was gray green against an angry red horizon.

Below them, the river flowed swiftly, the golden light of the sky reflected in it. Tall nopal cacti stood up in fantastic shapes. The group of adobe huts showed a light here and there.

Don Cesar and his officers stood a little way off, smoking cigarettes. Glasgow heard one of them laugh as the soldiers lined him up with his back to the wall of one of the huts.

It seemed to him that, until that moment, he had not expected to die. But he was going to be shot. Six riflemen could not miss at such close range.

Suddenly he thirsted for life. He wanted to protest against the outrage; it was plain murder of a noncombatant and an American.

But it was a personal revenge of Cesar's, so it would be useless to appeal to him for justice. Glasgow set his teeth.

The firing squad awaited the signal. Probably Don Cesar himself would give it; he was prolonging the agony!

Meanwhile, Glasgow had five minutes, three—perhaps only a minute more to live. This was incredible! He looked about him in involuntary wonder, as if he wanted to remember this last scene of his life.

The vivid light still shone on the heights, on the queer twisted nopal cacti that were cut out like green paper trees against the sky, the low adobes, the men swarming in the background, Don Cesar and his officers looking on, with the sparks showing vividly at the ends of their cigarettes. Far off, some one was playing on a mandolin—Consuelo's waltz, "La Amapola."

He was to die to that tune! He wanted to shake his fist at Cesar for it; he was sure he had ordered it.

What an eternity to wait! Would they never finish him? It was like being a rat caught in a trap; he—

Suddenly a woman's voice came loud and penetrating—a cry.

"Cesar—Cesar! Stop this!"

Glasgow's hands were tied behind him, but his fingers clenched furiously. He wanted to shout out: "Traitor!"

For it was Consuelo, in her scarlet dancing dress, her poppy *chal* over her shoulders, her head bare, her feet in delicate dancing shoes that were torn and dusty from the trail, her face haggard but beautiful. How beautiful no one knew better than Glasgow—and he hated her for it!

"La Amapola!" the men in the firing squad whispered to one another, staring at her.

Glasgow heard it, and his grim face set.

"What ails you?" he said to Pancho, fiercely. "Why don't you fellows shoot and be done with it?"

Consuelo did not hear him, and apparently she did not look at him. She climbed the rocks and stood facing Cesar. The make-up was still on her face, and her bosom rose and fell with every panting breath she drew. Her eyes were tragic.

"Cesar, you can't do it!" she gasped. "You shall not. I've come to stop you!"

Cesar waved back his officers. This was not for their ears. He was angry because they saw her there, disheveled, lovely, gasping for breath as she demanded the gringo's life of him.

"*Diablo!*" he exclaimed, angrily. "What madness brought you here, Consuelo?"

She paid no heed, but came nearer.

"Stop them—he must live!"

Cesar laughed bitterly. "Must he? Who was it gave him into my hands? He's going to die as a spy."

"He's an Americano!" Consuelo cried. Her hand leaped to her throat; she felt suffocated. "You—you must let him go, Cesar; you can't shoot him!"

"I can hang him," Cesar replied, coolly. "We hang spies. I was going to give him a better exit, but—" He shrugged. "As you please!"

Consuelo drew a long, hard breath. Suddenly she saw the adamant under that smooth exterior; she could neither break Cesar Rojas, nor bend him. There was only one appeal left to her, the appeal that she hated to make.

"You loved me, Cesar," she said in a low voice. "If you still love me, you'll give me this—this gringo's life!"

"Will I?" Cesar laughed bitterly. "I

think not. Ask me for something else, Consuelo! This gringo is going to die. Away, away, the sun is setting, and this is no place for you! Permit me to take you into the house over there. If you don't like the sound of volley firing, we can hang him, *querida!*"

Consuelo caught at his sleeve, her white hands shaking, her great eyes on his face.

"Cesar, if you kill that man it will be I who did it—yes!" She nodded vigorously. "I betrayed him, I—" She choked, tears filled her eyes, and she held out both hands, beseechingly. "Let him go! I've never asked anything of you, Cesar, but now I—I implore you to let him go!"

"So you care so much after all?" Cesar's smile was mocking, but the blood had run up into his temples, and his eyes were bloodshot. "What would you do to get it—his life at my hands?"

"You can't bargain for a life, Cesar Rojas!" the girl cried fiercely. "But you've got to give me his life, because I ask it!"

Cesar laughed discordantly.

"Do you see that cactus slope to the top of that bluff over the river, Consuelo? It is covered every inch with a new growth of little prickly pears. *Madre de Dios*, it would tear the flesh off a man's feet!"

"I see it!" Consuelo replied, wonderingly, dully.

"When you dance—barefoot—over that cacti—to the edge of that bluff," Cesar announced jeeringly, "then, and not until then, will I give you the gringo's life!"

Consuelo looked again at the cacti, gray green in the glowing dusk of the slope, yellow green where the setting sun touched it at the top of the great bluff.

"On your word of honor, Cesar, his life—if I dance barefoot to the top of the cliff?" she inquired softly.

Don Cesar grinned.

"All the way to the top, no shirking! Yes, when you do that, Consuelo, I'll let him go free."

"I'll do it!"

"*Dios mio!* You can't!" Don Cesar's face reddened and then paled. "Consuelo, you're mad!"

The *bailarina* had taken off her shoes, and was pulling off her silk stockings.

"You've promised his life. I'll do it, Cesar!"

"Consuelo, stop!" Don Cesar tried to seize her, but she evaded him.

"You've given your word of honor,

Cesar Rojas!" Consuelo stood up, slim and straight as a reed, her dark eyes unfathomable. "You can't take back your word; I'd publish you to all Mexico as the coward who broke his word to a woman! Where's the man who was playing my waltz on his mandolin? Oh, I see him—"

She called to the peon, who sat against one of the adobe houses, his mandolin on his knees, watching her, open mouthed.

"Play my waltz—'La Amapola!'" she said, imperiously.

"Mad woman!" Don Cesar cried. "You can't do it!"

Consuelo began to sway lightly on her bare feet. The afterglow poured its golden light over her painted face and her white shoulders, and caught the scarlet poppies on her *chal*.

The man with the mandolin was playing the soft, alluring strains of the waltz, watching her, touching the strings in perfect tune with her light swaying to and fro.

The firing squad had broken into units, each man leaning on his rifle. Pancho stood, hands on hips, watching.

Glasgow, with his hands tied ignominiously behind him, out of earshot, saw it all, and set his teeth hard. To him it was only another proof of Consuelo's intimacy with Cesar.

The beauty of her slim straight figure, as she swayed from the hips, her hands behind her lovely head, her feet beating time, only tore his heart with a fierce rage against her. Had she come there to see him die?

Consuelo loosed the *chal*, and whirled it about her until it wrapped her like the calyx of a scarlet poppy. Her naked feet began to move lightly at first, and then swiftly.

In a moment she had touched the prickly pears. Their cruel thorns began to cut her tender flesh, and swiftly the blood came.

Don Cesar saw it, and plunged forward, crying out:

"*Madre de Dios!* Come back! You can't do it!"

She defied him, her tortured eyes wide, blood dripping from her ankles.

"Your word of honor, Cesar!"

She flung it at him proudly. Her lips were shaking from that agony of the thorns tearing her delicate feet.

The soldier playing her waltz on his

mandolin, gasped, but he played on. She held him with this magnificent courage.

Don Cesar took a step backward, cursing his own folly. But she could not go on; her feet were bleeding! She was ten yards from the flat rock at the top. The thorns were tearing at her flesh like the beaks of predatory birds.

"*Dios*, she can't do it! She'll give up in a minute!" Cesar said to himself.

But Consuelo did not give up. She danced on, and, as she danced, the cactus tore into her flesh, and the blood flowed until her feet were red with it. Still she danced, not freely as at first, but painfully, almost woodenly.

The blood began to drip from her very knees; the cactus carpet was splashed with it. Spasms of agony shot through her—but still she danced.

Once she reeled, and nearly fainted, but with her eyes half closed she danced on. Every step was anguish, now; every swaying movement a thousand deaths.

The men came out of the huts to stare, aghast, and Cesar's officers talked apart, angrily.

Glasgow, standing with his hands bound behind him, back to the adobe wall, waiting to be shot, felt every stab of the girl's agony, although he did not know why she did it. He could not even guess.

An extraordinary exhibition—was it for Cesar? She was there with Cesar to see him shot! Good God, was it possible she had come for that?

Don Cesar clenched his hands. He no longer called to her; he stood looking at her, amazed. *Madre de Dios*, how she must love that pig of a gringo!

Consuelo danced slowly now. Then, fighting her agony, executing one more circle with arms uplifted, the poppy *chal* floating like a mist about her, reeling, half fainting, dripping blood, she reached her goal.

On the flat rock, with the darkening river far below her, she wavered for a moment, speechless. Then her hands went to her heart, and she straightened herself.

"Cesar!" she called out, her white lips stiff. "His life!"

Cesar turned and signaled to Pancho.

The man came, his rifle in his hands, ready for the order to shoot the prisoner.

"Pancho, take that gringo, as he is, bound," Don Cesar said sternly. "March him down the road to your boat, take him

across the river, cut his bonds, and let him loose there. He's free across the river. But he mustn't come back here, or else he dies. Go, instantly."

Pancho saluted. There was something like relief in his dark face, but his eyes were for the moment on the *bailarina*.

Consuelo stood on her pinnacle of agony, her beautiful feet torn and swollen. Behind her the sky was saffron, and against it her young figure stood straight and slender as a wand. Her dark head was lifted, and her eyes were on Glasgow.

Pancho and his squad of soldiers marched the prisoner down the narrow trail between the tall nopal cacti, below that dreadful growth of prickly pear that was sprinkled with Consuelo's blood.

Glasgow's hands were still tied behind him. He was bareheaded, and the whiteness of his face was not the pallor of fear. Death had come near him before this, and he had not been afraid to face it, but he thought that the girl had come there as Cesar's sweetheart to witness the American's humiliation.

He turned as he passed below her, and looked up. He did not see her bleeding feet. Their eyes met, and his challenged her, cold, stern, unrelenting.

"Traitor!" He muttered the word between his teeth, and passed on, a prisoner, but unbeaten.

Consuelo knew what he said, and she shuddered, but her eyes followed him as the men marched their prisoner down the long trail, like a felon. She watched until the twisted forms of the nopal cacti closed behind them and she saw only the dark, swift river far below, deep in the cut where the sunset light had gone out and night was coming on.

Her eyes clung to the river, to the swift flow of it, and her lips parted in agony. She reeled again with faintness, for the blood was running from her torn feet.

Then she heard a voice and gripped herself, and turned and smiled, her lips stiff and cold, her heart like lead, her knees like water.

"Consuelo," Don Cesar said, "I've given you the gringo's life—and you've seen how the pig thanked you for it. I'm sorry for you, Consuelo. I'm coming up to carry you down and—make you marry me!"

He began to step gingerly among the prickly pears, picking his way, his high,

military boots guarding him, yet he cursed in an undertone at the thorns.

Consuelo laughed wildly. Then she glanced upward at the sky, where the saffron had deepened, but only a single star as yet shone through it.

Her eyes went from the star back to Cesar, and from Cesar to the river, black, now, and swift.

Suddenly the peon, still sitting at the door of the hut, began again to play her waltz, softly—"La Amapola!"

The *bailarina* waved her hand to him, and began to dance. It was incredible, yet on her bleeding feet she danced. She danced wildly, beautifully, with perfect grace, as if her fierce spirit defied the weakness and the torture of the flesh.

"Consuelo!" Cesar cried. "Stop! I'll carry you down!"

The *bailarina* lifted her hands high above her head, turned her lovely tragic face to that far star, then danced to the very edge of the cliff, and flung herself headlong into the river.

X

It was night when Glasgow sat down alone in his den and stared in front of him—white and still-faced. The things that seemed inexplicable to him—Consuelo coming there to Don Cesar, and that terrible dance on the cactus spines—remained inexplicable still.

She had betrayed him, and then she had come there. For some reason, in some way, she must have made Don Cesar set him free.

Doubtless the actuality of the firing squad had chilled the woman's heart. But, in spite of that, she was a traitress!

There is a strange eccentricity in the human heart. Not even that betrayal broke the spell that bound him. She came back to him now, and he felt the touch of her fingers on his hand, the fragrance of her hair upon his lips; the flame of her poppies still dazzled him.

All his life he should remember; he should see her and hear her voice. He could not forget!

His glance fell on the picture she had torn and trampled. The fragments lay there still. He picked them up, went into the *patio*, struck a match, and burned the cardboard bits on the old brick pavement. The act sobered him; it seemed to give a concrete form to his emotion.

He went back into his bare little den, and eyed his old pistol that he had hunted up and loaded when he returned disarmed. It was an acute reminder of his capture on the hillside, and the loss of his new automatic. Probably Pancho had it!

But they had not taken his old pipe. He filled it, and hunted for a match. If he could smoke, he could think.

It was all over; to-morrow he should go home; he had made up his mind to that. The company could find a new man. To-night he meant to try to sleep.

He sat down with his back to the door and lit his pipe. A lamp burned beside his desk, and a litter of papers covered his table.

His ears rang with the strumming of the old mandolin and the strains of the waltz—"La Amapola!" He should hear it forever, and he should hate it.

He believed himself to be alone. Old Mariana was not there; even the glow-worm had left the *patio*.

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. Sitting thus, he could see the Spanish girl dancing on that horrible mat of cactus plants. But why? What madness had made her do it? Why had Cesar permitted it? Had she—

A sudden horrible thought penetrated his confused mind. Could it have been the price—that dance—the price of his life?

He half arose, and then sank back. The thought froze him. She must have suffered untold agony!

He did not hear the door open; he did not even hear steps in the vestibule. He saw nothing, but suddenly a dripping thing, a black *chal* with scarlet poppies on it—dripping poppies—was flung across the table in front of him.

It lay there, making little pools of reddened water, dripping little streams of scarlet—as if the poppies bled.

Glasgow stared at it. Then he turned his head, and saw Don Cesar Rojas standing there, a strange, arresting figure, his uniform splashed, his eyes haggard, mud streaked on his cheek and on his white hands.

For a full minute they stared at each other, and then Cesar said:

"I couldn't shoot you because of her. I gave her your life for that dance on the cacti. I never thought she would attempt it! When you were gone she leaped into

the river. This is all that is left; we found it in the water. She didn't love me. You—you gringo; it was you she loved, and she died for you! I've brought her *chal*, that you may never forget; that you'll be accursed with it, and see the scarlet poppies of her love forever!"

Glasgow arose slowly, tall and gaunt, with a face gone gray and eyes that burned.

"I'm not a killing man," he said slowly, looking straight into Cesar's eyes, "but if you've murdered her—by God, I'm going to kill you!"

Don Cesar folded his arms. His dark face was drained of blood.

"I promised her—on my word of honor—that I'd let you go," he said harshly. "Otherwise, *señor*—" His smile was bitter.

Glasgow stared at him, his breast heaving, his hand closing on the old pistol he had left there. "You—you murderer," he said, "you'll fight if I—" He took a step around the table.

Cesar waited, a deadly flame leaping into his eyes, too. If Glasgow struck him, then—then he could kill!

For one tense moment they faced each other; then Glasgow took a lamp and set it on a shelf outside the door. The yellow rays lit up the *patio*, showing the old, stained bricks of the pavement, the mossy well, the gray earthenware jar full of poppies that Mariana had carefully set in place again.

Glasgow saw them and choked. Across his arm was the dripping *chal*, with its scarlet poppies, like the drops of blood upon the cacti.

"We can fight here," he said to Don Cesar.

"I gave my word of honor to let you off," Cesar replied, following him into the *patio*, "but if now you try to strike me, I'll kill you—you pig of a gringo!"

Glasgow's eyes flashed. "You yellow—" he began, tauntingly.

"*Señor!*" It was almost a shriek that interrupted them.

They both turned. In the vestibule stood old Tomaso, a mud-stained, dripping figure.

"*Señores*, wait! You'll come, *señor?*" He turned to Glasgow, and ignored Don Cesar. "She's dying—but she's spoken your name!"

Both men gasped. A grayish pallor was deepening in Cesar's dark face.

Glasgow caught old Tomaso by the arm. "Where—"

"I rowed her across the river to-day, *señor*, and she ordered me away, but I waited. I watched in the river. I saw her leap, and I dragged her from the water far from where Don Cesar's men were looking. The current had carried her swiftly. Her poor dear feet—" Old Tomaso wrung his hands.

"She'll never dance again, *señor!*" he sobbed. "We've sent for the *padre*—but she still lives; she speaks your name; but she's dying."

"Tomaso—" Don Cesar's voice broke like a woman's.

The old peon pointed a shaking finger at him.

"Murderer!" he shouted. "Murderer! Pancho told me—you made her dance—her feet—*Madre de Dios*, may you be cursed for it! *Señor*, come—" He turned again to the Americano.

Glasgow was dazed. He laid his pistol down, and he did not see the grayness of Cesar's face, but he heard Tomaso speak to him once more as they stood there.

"If she dies it will be you who have killed her!"

Cesar said nothing, but flung his cloak across his face and, passing them without a word, went out into the night.

In a daze, Glasgow followed old Tomaso, the poppy *chal* still dripping in his hands, the fragrance of it coming to him with a thousand stabs of recollection.

The night was dark, with only the stars, and the street lamp was dim and smoky at the corner of the Street of Broken Hearts. Glasgow strode across the grimy cobblestones, bowed his tall head, and entered the little door set in the big door of the Mendoza house. Tomaso led him across the *patio*, past the pinkish purple blossoms of the passion flower, and stood aside at an open door.

The large room was dim, and the shadow of a crucifix showed faintly on the ceiling. A priest knelt here on the floor. Over there, near the wall, was the black robed figure of a Sister of Mercy.

Glasgow saw nothing but the white face on the pillows, the long hair wet, the bandages on feet and ankles showing red spots, the white shoulder scarred where a nopal cactus had struck it.

He had called her traitress, and she had danced in her own blood to save him.

Humbled, he dropped to his knees beside the great Spanish bed; humbled, he lifted her cold little hands in his and held them.

"Consuelo!"

Tía Antonia sobbed aloud. "She's dying—she can't hear you now!"

"She shall not die!" Glasgow said passionately, and called to her again.

"Consuelo—my beloved!"

Who shall say that one soul cannot call

to another? Who dares to claim that love is not as great as death?

The dark lashes seemed to stir on the white cheeks, and the stiff lips parted. He could see the flutter of breath in her throat.

He laid his head down on the edge of the bed, choking back the sob that rose in his throat, a sob of sheer, maddening joy.

He had felt her hand growing warm in his with returning life!

THE END

The Love Game

WHEREIN THE NET RESULT IS NOT AT ALL THE AFFECTION-
ATE AFFAIR THAT THE UNINITIATED WOULD SUPPOSE

By George F. Worts

JEFFERY HUFF HOLLINGS, to give him his whole name, was so poorly equipped for life that his parents, his doctors, and his nurses unanimously believed that he would never live to see his third birthday. But the will to live burned fiercely in the infant, and he reached the age of three, puny, skinny, and limp from the battle he had waged for the right to exist.

Little Jeffery fairly dragged himself past that third milepost, and the prediction was generally made that he would not live to see five candles on his birthday cake. It was with what looked almost like his expiring breath that he blew these candles out, as the ancient custom decreed.

Jeffery continued to claw at the precarious finger hold he had upon the narrow ledge of existence. Aside from suffering from the various ills to which an anæmic child with a bad start is heir, he was a rallying ground for all the epidemic disease germs that came to town.

He came down successively with chicken pox, measles, German measles, black measles, scarlet fever, mumps, and whooping cough. He had croup. He had colic.

Every time Jeffery sank into the dark sea of some new ailment, no one expected to see him emerge again; but time after

time he did. He came out of the depths, fighting harder than ever.

So it went, year after year, until he was ten. Then he climbed an apple tree in quest of forbidden fruit, fell out of it, and broke his hip.

The doctor who attended him stated that poor Jeffery would never walk again. He lay in a cast for months. When he was eleven he was hobbling about on crutches. By the time he was twelve he was limping about without them.

It would take too much space to give here in detail the physical sufferings through which Jeffery passed as a growing boy. It is safe to say, however, that they were eclipsed by his mental sufferings.

Jeffery had an older brother named Richard, or Dick, as he was called, of course; and everything that Jeffery was not, Richard was. He was a healthy, robust child, he had a winning personality, he was a born leader.

From the parental standpoint, Dick was a joy. He was never sick a day in his life, as the saying is.

In a word, you couldn't have found two more sharply contrasting boys if you had combed the world for them. One was hearty, vigorous, and amusing; the other was a dull invalid.

It is not a very nice commentary on Jeffery's parents, but the truth was that he was merely tolerated by them. You can give sympathy, or pity, to a sick person for only so long, and then you become fatigued; you become indifferent. Dick was always having new interests; Jeff was always having new symptoms.

Dick was a leader. In high school he was on the track team, the baseball nine, the football eleven, the hockey and swimming teams.

He grew into a big, fine-looking, husky lad, with curly black hair, flashing dark eyes, brown skin, and a laughing red mouth. He was immensely popular with girls, and—what was perhaps more important—with their parents. He was the kind of fellow you wanted your daughter to marry when she grew up.

Jeffery began having pains in his interior which led to an appendicitis operation just about the time his good-looking big brother was ready for college.

II

DICK departed for the seat of learning in a blaze of glory. Dazzling reports came back home. The folks could well be proud of him.

He was not only doing exceptionally well in his studies, but he stood a fine chance of making the freshman crew, baseball and football teams. Within a month he had bids from the three best fraternities there.

It was all so characteristic of Dick. Everything came easily to him. He wrote to his mother:

It certainly is funny how easily all of this stuff seems to come to me. I guess the little old world is my oyster, all right. I have only to glance over a lesson and I have it down cold. It was just about the same with the crew. I'd never done much rowing, you know, but I seemed to fit in behind that oar as if I'd been born for it. The only trouble is with my tennis. Something seems to be wrong with my coordination. The school needs fellows badly for the tennis team, but it looks like too much trouble to me.

His mother paused in her reading, looked up and smiled at the father.

"I shouldn't think he would bother with tennis," she said.

"Not when he can do so many other things with so little effort," Mr. Hollings agreed.

Jeffery was toying with a great mound of heavily buttered mashed potatoes—he was on a fat-starch-sugar diet just then, to

gain weight—and he now laid down his fork.

"Bunk!" he remarked. "The trouble with Dick is that everything comes too easy for him. It would do him a lot of good if he would tackle something he couldn't do—and keep on tackling it."

Jeffery's parents stared at him with amazement. It was not that he had just uttered what was probably his first adult remark, but he had dared—he, Jeffery, the quasi invalid, the semicripple—to cast disparagement upon Dick's athletic and intellectual perfections.

His father brought a fist down on the table with a bang.

"It seems to me—" he began.

"Now, now," Mrs. Hollings hastily intervened, and the distressed look she addressed to the head of the house said plainly, as it had been saying for years: "You must remember, dear, that poor Jeffery is not responsible. He is an invalid. He is not long for this earth."

Mr. Hollings subsided, and the remainder of Dick's bubbling letter fell upon a strained hush.

Jeffery slowly masticated his mashed potatoes. He really adored his handsome big brother, but he didn't think for a moment that Dick was perfect. Shucks, no! Dick had flaws, like everybody else, and it would do him good to have them pointed out to him.

But Jeffery didn't waste much time thinking about that. What Dick had said about tennis might have been so many words of fire, as far as Jeffery was concerned. Here was a game—a simple, easy enough game when you watched it played—that stumped his big brother.

Here was the seed of a great resolve.

III

"I AM going to become a tennis player," Jeffery informed himself that night in bed, hours after he should have been asleep. "I am going to become a great tennis player!"

He would say nothing of this aspiration, of course, to any one, for Jeffery had a horror of being laughed at. He, a limping invalid, wishing to become a tennis player! How ridiculous!

The equipment with which he was to begin his career as a great tennis player was not a very promising one, to say the least, including, as it did, a constitution

weakened by sickness and operations, one game leg, and an abysmal ignorance of all the laws of athletics. On the credit side of the ledger was hardly anything more than a spirit that simply wouldn't be cowed.

"One thing is pretty sure," he consoled himself. "There isn't a dog-gone sickness left for me to have—I've had 'em all."

The doctors had agreed, one after another, that he must be terribly careful of himself. He mustn't exert himself, mustn't strain his heart, and must watch that leg as if it were made of glass—and so on.

"I don't care if I do kill myself," he mused that night. "What's the sense of just existing the way I've been doing? It'd be much better to die doing something worth while than to pass the rest of my life being a dog-goned invalid."

You can see that there was a real spark in the kid. It was well past midnight when he burned that bridge behind him, and it was well on toward dawn when he burned the next one.

He stealthily left his bed and, in his bare feet—ignoring the bedroom slippers he had been so sedulously warned to wear because of his frail health—padded into the bathroom with a wastebasket in one hand.

He placed the basket on the floor, closed the door, and, with a beating heart, transferred every one of his medicine bottles and pill boxes from the medicine chest to the receptacle at his feet. There were tonics and liniments and sedatives galore.

He placed them all in the wastebasket. He smiled grimly when he found that he had nearly filled it with the pellets and the nostrums calculated at one time or another by one doctor or another to aid him in clinging to the spark called life.

He carried the heavy basket downstairs and across the back yard to the ash pile behind the big brick barn. A sallow moon shone down on a scene that might have been some sort of voodoo ceremony.

Jeffery obtained two bricks. Between these he ground to dust the globular contents of the pill boxes. The medicine bottles he poured out upon the pill dust.

With this audacious gesture, having thrown off forever the shackles of allopathy and homeopathy, the sixteen-year-old dare-devil slunk back into the house and into bed.

In the morning his mother's outcry

could be heard by sensitive ears over all the neighborhood.

Jeffery sat tight.

"No, mother, no more medicine."

"But—but—your tonic?"

"No more tonic."

"Your blood medicine?"

"No more blood medicine."

She looked at her second-born anxiously.

"Do—do you feel all right, dear?"

"I feel swell."

She looked at him again, and it might be well to give a brief picture of what she saw—Jeffery Huff Hollings at the age of sixteen, when the great resolve was born. What she saw was a tall, spindling youth with pale eyes, large and blue. He was fair skinned and fair haired.

He had large hands. He also had large feet. Here was a boy that nobody in this wide world but his mother would look at twice.

"Are—are you sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure!"

Without waiting to do the housework, Mrs. Hollings paid a hurried visit to her husband's office at the lumber mill. She told him about the empty medicine chest and this strange new Jeffery.

"Let him work things out his own way," Mr. Hollings advised. "More power to him. He won't live long. Let him enjoy life as he sees fit as long as he can."

Jeffery could have told you almost to a syllable what was said during that conversation. He knew that he wasn't expected to live long. All of his life he hadn't been expected to live long. Each new birthday was a miracle.

Secretly he bought books on tennis, and in secret he took the first faltering steps of the tennis beginner. He watched others play tennis, and it wasn't long before he found out some valuable things—long before his brother put the same things into black and white in a letter to his mother. Dick wrote:

They need men so badly for the tennis team that I've decided to go out for it. I've analyzed my game pretty well. All I have is my footwork. My service is poor and my backhand just doesn't exist, but I can cover the court and I am going to work out my game along the lines of least resistance.

Jeffery nodded approvingly when this portion of the letter was read at the dinner table. He had seen that some players had marvelous footwork, but that others

relied more on the accuracy of their shots and the deadliness of their service.

He analyzed other men's games, and from these analyses he built up, at first mentally, his own. His game leg was a handicap that must be made up for in other ways.

IV

THERE was an open space on the blind side of the brick barn. This side was screened by the barn itself from the house, and on the other sides by fruit trees.

He cleared out the weeds and rubbish, mowed the grass and rolled the space. At first the work was agony. He had never before used his muscles. But the job of clearing was finally done.

He bought a tennis racket and balls, and seriously applied himself to tennis solitaire, standing back the correct distance from the brick wall and batting the ball at it and returning it on the rebound.

His game leg was a torturing weight. The first few nights after the beginning of practice, he could not sleep for the pain in his hip.

Dark areas now appeared under Jeffery's eyes. His mother commented anxiously upon him. Hadn't he better see a doctor? No, thank you! Jeffery was through with doctors.

He drew a chalk line along the brick wall, the same height and the same length as a tennis net, and he marked off the clearing into the half of a tennis court. At the end of two months Jeffery could send the ball to a spot within a foot above the chalk line seven times out of ten.

His accuracy and his speed increased. The pain in his hip grew less pronounced, but it would, he knew, always trouble him to some extent.

It was at about this time that Jeffery had his first love affair. Her name was Virginia Blair, and, like the first object of every man's adoration, she would remain a lovely flower in his heart forever.

He had, of course, seen Virginia about the streets of Milldale for quite a few years, but girls had little use for him—a chronic invalid—and he had no use at all for girls. He detested the creatures.

This one, of course, was different. Their first meeting came about on a sunny early summer afternoon. Jeff was back behind the barn, batting the ball against the brick wall, limping to and fro; serving, returning,

backhanding; close to the net, back on the backline.

It was surprising how nimbly that semi-cripple could cover the crude court he had made. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, and he made little crooning noises to himself as he loped here and there after the ball.

It was, however, not a pathetic spectacle. It was a pretty spectacle. He was good. He was mighty good.

The drawback of that game leg was made up for in other ways. He had a tremendous reach; his timing was perfect, or it seemed so.

Here, in short, was a beautiful example of the marvelously elastic adaptation to which every human is heir if he will only take the trouble to accept what God gives him. Here was a boy, a half cripple, covering what stood for a tennis court as skillfully as if he were sound.

No; it was not pathetic. It was amazing. It was great stuff.

There was real grace in the way Jeff went after that ball, and in the way he kept it going. It was nice to see how well he timed his movements. There wasn't an inch of lost motion; not an ounce of wasted energy.

V

"Good night!" said a voice from behind a rosebush.

Jeffery Huff Hollings dropped the racket as if it had suddenly become a red-hot poker, and he swung about, prepared to stutter and stammer. He was red with sudden anger.

It had been his upmost fear—this ever present danger of discovery. For two months, now, he had been practicing in private; not even his mother suspected what he was up to. She thought he spent his time in the orchard, reading.

The owner of the voice appeared from her hiding place behind the rosebush. She was a slim, pretty girl of fifteen, with bright brown eyes and nice tanned hands. Now her eyes were brighter than ever with excitement.

"Jeffery Hollings!" she exclaimed. "Say, how long has this been going on?"

"Aw, shucks!" the gallant young gentleman replied.

"Honest, Jeff, you're a perfect whiz! Say, let me try that."

"Sure," Jeff agreed, gruffly. He recov-

ered the racket and the ball from where they lay, and gave them to her. He had watched Virginia Blair play tennis; she had a pretty good game. Now he watched her with the greatest of interest.

The girl addressed the ball with such vigor that it rebounded into the orchard, and was not found until the following spring.

"Play just as if you were playing tennis," he advised her. "You get just as good as you give, remember."

But she couldn't do it; not the way he could. Virginia very soon became discouraged at her failure.

"Well, I don't care," she said presently, panting. "This isn't tennis. I'll bet I could beat you at tennis—real tennis."

"Probably could," Jeff admitted. "I never played a game of real tennis in my life."

"Come on over to our court and play a set with me."

"Nothing doing! Not me!"

"Why not?"

"I'm not going to have all the smart Alecks in this town laughing at me, that's why. When I get good and ready, I'll show 'em. Dog-gone it, why did you have to come over here, butting in, anyhow?"

A snappy rejoinder was on little Miss Blair's tongue, but she didn't utter it. She was a sensitive girl, and she was an intelligent girl, too. And an idea—a great idea—was already taking form in the back of her pretty head.

"I won't breathe it to a soul, honestly I won't, Jeff!" she declared. "And if you'll come over and play with me, nobody will have to know. You know how our court is hidden, and what shape it's in. Nobody uses it any more. It's a pretty bum court, but we can roll it and play on it. Come on, Jeff."

Jeff was strongly tempted. He was, in fact, dying to try out his stuff on a real court.

He finally let her wheedle him into going over and playing with her. They cut through back lots, where he wouldn't be seen, limping along with his racket, and he played her two sets.

Virginia lost consistently, and she wasn't letting him take games from her, just to humor him along, either. He started right out and took game after game away from her.

"Jeff," she said finally, breathless from

the way he had made her fly all over the court, "you are a perfect whiz. If you'll work on that backhand and get that service faster, you're going to be a world beater."

Jeff fairly glowed with gratitude and embarrassment. They were the first words of real praise he had ever received from any quarter, and from the moment of their utterance he was Virginia Blair's slave. He knew that she was telling the truth, too.

"Come over every afternoon after school," Virginia suggested. "You can practice against the barn for an hour or so, then we'll have time before dark for a couple of sets."

"Gee, I hate to take up so much of your time."

"Don't be silly. I'm just as crazy about tennis as you are, and you'll help my game just as much as I'll help yours—more! You've got more stuff right now than I'll ever have. Now I'm not going to tell a soul, and don't you, either. Let's make a whiz-bang tennis player out of you—and then surprise everybody."

"There are a lot of people in this town," Jeff said, earnestly, warmed by her friendly interest, "who don't think I'm anything but an invalid."

"We'll show 'em, Jeff!"

"You bet we will!" Jeff agreed, and Virginia knew that no man of mature years had ever made a resolve to which he had clung more tenaciously than would Jeff to this one.

VI

THE passion to make over people is not generally born in women until much later, but Virginia had already made up her mind that she was going to shape Jeff according to her whims. He was fine clay, worthy of practicing upon.

She would take full charge of him. She would be his trainer, his mentor, his counselor and his mother confessor.

Perhaps she wasn't old enough to realize that Jeff must learn that the world loved people who did things, and did them smilingly and with relish, and it couldn't be blamed for being intolerant of people who only held on to life by a thread—and were always glum about it. But she did sense that a revolution had to take place in Jeffery before he would ever become popular.

To her first efforts, Jeff did not offer much assistance. He was suspicious of

Virginia, as he was suspicious of everybody. All he wanted was to get revenge on the world by showing it how superior he was at tennis.

Virginia tried to soften him; to make him try to be nice and pleasant to people. She dragged him to parties, to popcorn roasts and barn dances, and, once there, she pushed him forward.

But people were, generally, too diffident. They treated him as an invalid. They were always asking him how he felt.

And Virginia came to realize before long that the first thing to do was to make Jeffery into a tennis phenomenon. He must get over his feeling of inferiority before he could make progress in other directions; of this she was fully aware.

The tennis part of it was really a lot of fun. Jeffery was content to wait. He knew that his game was getting better and better; one of these days he would astound Milldale.

Bright and breezy letters continued to arrive from Dick. He did not come home that summer, but spent his vacation with his roommate's family at Bar Harbor.

The tenor of his letters underwent a subtle, then a more noticeable change. You gathered that Dick Hollings was not in the least ashamed of his ability in so many directions. You gleaned that girls vied with one another for his favor.

He was being asked everywhere. He was doing wonderfully in his class work. In his sophomore year he was made stroke oar on the crew; he was the pitcher on the ball team, and he was playing fullback on the eleven.

The most exciting day in Jeffery's life was the one on which a letter came from Dick, announcing that he was the fourth man on the tennis team. He had made the team! Then the letter became cruel.

Jeffery's mother had not had time to read the letter before dinner, and she was well into that cruel passage before she realized what it was all about.

"I wish to the dickens I had some other kind of a bro—" the unkind passage began.

Mrs. Hollings's voice faltered. She stopped. She darted a frightened glance at Jeff, and she looked imploringly at her husband. Mr. Hollings was staring fixedly at her, softly drumming on the table with his fingers. He had not been able, although he had tried hard, to disguise his contempt for Jeffery.

"Other kind of a brother?" Jeff helped her.

His mother's eyes skipped on down the page to a description of a dance that Dick had attended. She read it in a falsely eager voice, ignoring Jeff's question.

He watched her after dinner; saw her push the letter into a table drawer in the sitting room, and, at the first opportunity, got the letter. He calmly read the entire passage. It said:

I wish to the dickens I had some other kind of a brother than Jeff. I am in a position to give him all sorts of opportunities here at school, but what's the use? I have made good here in a big way, and I could make things mighty pleasant for Jeff if he wasn't such a weak sister.

Of course, Dick didn't know about the change that had come over Jeff since Virginia had taken charge of him; and no one knew about the tennis except Virginia. Jeff wasn't sore at Dick; he wasn't even bitter. A fellow who was playing the kind of tennis that Jeff was playing didn't have to envy anybody.

"Weak sister, am I?" Jeff mused, without bitterness. "I am afraid my beautiful big brother is coming down with a beautiful big swelled head."

He put the letter back in the drawer, went out behind the barn, and pinned a sheet of note paper above the chalk line. He hit the bull's-eye fairly with nine balls out of ten, all of them returned on the rebound.

"Ninety per cent," he growled. "I won't be satisfied until I am a hundred per cent."

VII

HE said nothing of the letter to Virginia Blair, for it was along about this time that Jeffery realized that he was desperately in love with her. She already meant more to him than his own mother did.

He was gruff with Virginia. He appeared to be absolutely indifferent to her. In a word, he adored her. And it was natural, considering his age and his temperament, that he keep this fact strictly to himself.

He suffered innumerable hells, and said nothing. Virginia might have gone to her grave at a ripe old age in ignorance of the sweet turbulence she had stirred in his breast if she had not taken matters into her own hands.

Virginia, after all, was only human. She

had made Jeffery what he was to-day, and she had done it—at least in the beginning—in a fine altruistic spirit, expecting no reward. She had enjoyed her job of molding a pale and sulky invalid into a brisk and personable young man; but now that that job was more or less accomplished, she found that another emotion was swaying her.

Jeffery was no longer an object of pity. He was seventeen, now, and the rigorous exercise he had been taking in the sun, day after day, had brought about a remarkable change in him.

He had filled out. His shoulders had broadened. His face had lost its pallor, and was now as brown as brown.

Even the color of his eyes had deepened, from a pale, sickly blue to a dark, sparkling blue. And his light, limp hair had become curly and kinky, with a golden fuzz about the temples. He was going to be a handsome young man.

Men were scarce in Milldale, and Jeffery Huff Hollings was on the verge of becoming a man. Girls were noticing him. He was being invited places oftener. He was learning to play a banjo, and he sang quite well.

And Virginia was experiencing some of the feelings that must have ebbed and flowed through Frankenstein when the monster he had created threatened to get beyond his control. She had created this new Jeffery, and, first thing she knew, he was going to slip from her control.

It was Lila May Saunders who precipitated matters. She would have been called, a few generations ago, the belle of the town. Now she was merely the snappiest, most popular girl in Milldale.

For a long time she merely tolerated Jeffery, then, suddenly, she became aware of the change in him, and she set her traps for him. She had him over for dinners and suppers; she took him riding in her little speed roadster.

Virginia stood this as long as she could, then she demanded a showdown. She took Jeffery for a ride in her own roadster, one scented spring afternoon, and parked under an elm beside a brook.

It was a most romantic setting. She had on her prettiest dress, and she was wearing the particular shade of gold stockings that Jeffery admired so much.

She turned about in the seat to face him, and regarded him steadily with her large

brown eyes. She was pale with the nervousness of the moment, and more beautiful in her distraught condition than Jeffery had ever seen her. He looked at her wonderingly for a few moments.

"Jeffery," Virginia began in a tight little voice, "I want to know how much you like Lila May."

"Why," Jeff replied, astonished, "I like her a lot. Why?"

"Do you like her more than any other girl in Milldale?"

Jeffery turned red. He hadn't been expecting this.

"N-no," he stammered. "You ought to know I don't."

She looked at him severely.

"Who is the girl you like better?"

Poor Jeffery turned redder and redder.

"You ought to know!" he gulped.

"You mean, you like me better?"

"I certainly ought to, oughtn't I?" the bashful young Lothario burst out.

"I don't care what you ought to do," Virginia said. "I want to know who you really like better, without any 'oughts' connected with it."

Jeffery was now carried beyond the embarrassed stage. He opened up freely, in a veritable explosion.

"Gee whiz, Virginia, I shouldn't think you'd even have to ask me who I like best in Milldale," he declared. "You know I like you better than any other girl. Gee whiz, I'm crazy about you! Gee whiz, look at all you've done for me!"

"I don't want gratitude!" the maiden snapped.

"It isn't gratitude," he groaned. "Golly, you ought to be able to see it with your own eyes. I don't care a darn about any other girl, and I never will. You're so pretty and nice and—and everything."

"You mean, you love me?" Virginia demanded.

"Yes, I do! You bet I do. I—I love you so much it makes me feel kind of sick sometimes. I think about you all the time. You're the nice—You're the most wond—Gee, I don't know how to say it."

Virginia had been looking at him approvingly while he said all this, following the movements of his head with hers, leaning forward when he turned, so that she could see his eyes, her own becoming brighter and brighter.

Now she gave a little incoherent exclamation, threw her arms around his neck,

and swiftly kissed him. Then, as swiftly, she relinquished him.

The kiss took the beneficiary's breath away. Jeffery turned pale, then color seemed to leap into his face until he was as red as a scarlet tanager. He recovered sufficiently to respond fittingly.

He gave her a hug that squashed the breath out of her, yet it was not entirely the ardor of his ignited young passion that caused him to squeeze her so hard. It was rather a grim hug.

"Virginia," he said, "one of these days I am going to be a rich man, and it's going to be all for you. I'm going to give you everything in the world you want."

"Sweet kid! You do love me, don't you?"

"What a question! You're the only girl in the world!"

"Well, you're the only boy in the world!"

For some seconds they just sat there and contemplated each other in the divine ecstasy of their mutual discovery.

"Now, when," Jeff asked presently, "am I going up to the country club and show these people that I'm not a cripple, even if I do limp?"

"Wait," Virginia replied. "It isn't time yet. I want you to get that backhand perfect. I'm so proud of you, Jeff, and I want to show you off. You're the only man in this town who has any get up and go. And everybody thinks you're a dub. I don't want 'em to think my boy is a dub, because he isn't a dub. But I want you to perfect your backhand and the backspin on that serve before you strut your stuff."

"All right—sweetheart," Jeffery agreed, huskily.

VIII

THE opportunity did not come until a few months later, when Dick, having finished his sophomore year, came home for his summer vacation. Almost two years, now, in secret, Jeffery had been playing tennis solitaire, and playing singles with Virginia.

His willingness to keep it a secret was self-revelatory. Jeffery distrusted the world. It had pitied him, and it had been scornful of him.

Nothing short of a smashing triumph would satisfy him. It was a kink in his nature that Virginia was doing her level best to straighten out.

Dick Hollings was a changed young man. Easy victories in athletics, and the adulation that accompanied his victories, had somehow spoiled the young man. Eastern girls had made no end of a fuss over Dick.

He was rather contemptuous of the old home town, and almost everybody in it. His clothing was startling, and his "line" was breath-taking.

The first important happening of that eventful summer was his discovery of the existence of Virginia Blair. When he had gone away, Virginia was a skinny little thing, all arms and legs.

She was seventeen now, and had blossomed into a beauty, with velvety brown eyes, and a mature charming manner. She was slim and very alluring. Some day she would be a startling beauty, and the promise was well on its way to fulfillment.

"I like your girl," Dick said, patronizingly, to Jeffery one morning.

"She's a mighty nice girl," Jeffery informed him.

"How's neckings?" the sophisticated undergraduate wanted to know.

"Aw, gee, Dick, we're kind of slow and old-fashioned out here."

"Don't try to make me believe that you and Virginia don't mug each other!" the older brother exclaimed, in genuine surprise at a phenomenon.

Jeff would not dignify this remark with an answer, but his face was enlightening.

"Well, I'll change all that, kid!" Dick declared, complacently. "I'm the greatest softener of feminine hearts in this well-known world. I'll work over your village Galatea until you'll have to neck her in self-defense!"

"Is it nice to talk about a good girl like that?" Jeffery demanded.

"It is," was the prompt reply. "The trouble with civilization, dear brother, is this: there are entirely too many nice girls! They slow us down like—like a lot of flivvers out ahead of a real car. Speed, kid, is what we want. Watch me throw into high with little Virginia!"

Jeffery laughed hollowly. He was pretending that he thought his big, handsome brother was fooling. If Dick proved to be in earnest, his little, lame brother would find it difficult to laugh at all.

Dick Hollings was in earnest. He set out to rush Miss Blair, and he managed to take up every minute of her time.

He took her riding. He took her golf-

ing. He played tennis with her. He took long walks with her. He called her up morning, noon, and night.

Everybody was beginning to talk about them. Dick was a fast worker, all right. And there seemed to be nothing for Jeffery to do but look on and suffer. He never had a moment alone with her, it seemed. Dick was always popping up and horn-ing in.

Jeff wanted to challenge Dick to a fist fight. He wanted to smite him with some heavy blunt instrument, but he reasoned himself out of this state of mind. Nobody wanted him. Nobody had ever wanted him.

Virginia, for awhile, had pretended to want him—until a really attractive, fasci-nating man came along. There wasn't anything to resent about it, when you looked at it sensibly; it was just too bad. Socking Dick with a piece of lead pipe wouldn't cure the situation.

Jeffery had always admired his big, fine-looking brother, but his adoration quickly turned to something akin to hatred. Dick's contempt for him was so obvious, and he took no pains to hide it.

And his attitude toward Virginia was so darned proprietary. He was in the habit of making up nicknames for the people he liked, and in no time at all he had made up one that suited Virginia to a T. It was Peachy.

Sometimes he alternated this with Cud-dles. Cuddles, it appeared, was a name he bequeathed to any girl who lived up to his particular specifications for desirable womanhood.

Jeffery had never coined a nickname for Virginia, and Peachy fitted her perfectly. She was in so many ways like a peach. Her complexion was that of the peach—the peach when it is ripe and luscious. Peachy! Cuddles! Damn!

In hardly any time, all the good work that Virginia had been doing threatened to be undone. Jeff had loved her, adored her; she had been the first person in Milldale to accept him, to treat him as an equal, and, later, to be enthusiastic about his possibilities, the one person who had seemed to want him and to need him.

Now no one wanted him. His parents had never wanted him. They really des-pised him; saw him through the eyes of Richard, but were too tactful to be as out-spoken as was Richard. Virginia was turn-

ing away from him, as a moth turns from a dull light to a brilliant one, and for Jef-fery the world was growing sour again.

He took out his vengeance on the brick wall. He was shooting over that backhand as he had never shot it over before.

IX

MATTERS came to a head one afternoon at the country club. The annual tennis tournament with the Highridge Country Club had just been announced.

The tennis committee was anxious for a big turnout. It was always an eventful tournament. Competition was keen, and occasionally quite bitter.

On several previous years the captain of the winning team had become runner-up to the State champion, and on two occasions had eventually become State cham-pion. One of these had got as far as Tilden before his wings were clipped.

Dick had been urged repeatedly to go out for the Milldale team. He had become Number Two man on his college team, and he would lend great strength to the Mill-dale team.

But Dick was reluctant. Perhaps he wanted to be coaxed. He said he wanted to rest. He had had a pretty strenuous athletic season, and playing through the elimination contests would be mighty hard work. No; he preferred to loaf.

Jeffery managed to suppress his con-tempt of this attitude. He knew Dick well enough to know that Dick would be on hand when the real eliminating began; that he would wait and make a grand stand af-fair of it. He knew that Dick loved all this coaxing and wheedling and cajoling.

The tennis committee respectfully wait-ed upon Dick, and he brusquely declined. He could not appear at the country club without being besieged by young men and girls, begging him to play.

A group of them were sitting about on the wide veranda. Virginia was there, and Lila May Saunders, and Madeline Page, the daughter of the banker, and Dick and Jeffery. Madeline Page exclaimed:

"Oh, Dick, stop being a spoil sport. Say you'll play."

Dick laughed at her.

"Haven't you got any local pride?"

Madeline persisted.

"For this hick town?"

Every one laughed at that. Milldale was a hick town. They all admitted it.

It was the thing to do—to laugh at your town if the population was under a million.

"Will you, Dick?" Madeline repeated.

Dick was silent. He appeared bored by all this wheedling. The silence was general. Every one waited for him to answer.

Into the silence fell the amused voice of Jeffery, as follows:

"He wants to be coaxed some more. How that boy loves this stuff!"

The silence continued, but it was suddenly strained. Jeffery had put into words what every one by now realized.

Dick turned slowly and looked at him. It was a deliberately insolent look. Dick was flushed. Even his ears were an interesting dark red.

"Listen, Limpy," he said evenly, "when I get ready to play tennis with this bunch of hicks, I'll play, and not one-tenth of a second before."

It was the first time any one had referred, even obliquely, to Jeffery's limp. Some one uttered a sharp gasp, as of pain, but it wasn't Jeffery. He was stretched out lazily in his chair, and he was relaxed. Now he was grinning. He wasn't in the least resentful.

He returned Dick's hot glare with the grin. Every one was watching him, covertly or openly.

"My beautiful big brother," Jeff remarked, presently, "I think you have turned into a first-class slob—I said slob—and I am getting awfully tired of seeing you strut around here as if you owned the earth. I feel like taking you on for a set. The elimination contests might as well start right now."

Again there was silence. It was a thicker and an uglier silence than before. It was broken by Dick's laughter. He got rid of some of his anger by that derisive laughter.

"Jeff," he said, presently, "do you know any more jokes?"

"I'm not joking," Jeff replied. "Get a couple of rackets, somebody, and we'll do it now."

The others were smiling sympathetically. They admired Jeff for his stand, but it was really ridiculous. Jeff Hollings, the invalid, the cripple, a tennis player! It was too much.

"Look here," Dick said, leaning toward him gravely, "if you can beat me, will you promise to play in the tournament?"

"Sure," Jeff answered, as naively as a

child who is being made the butt of a practical joke, "sure, I'll promise."

"And you've got to promise me not to play rough," Dick continued sternly.

"You'll let me play as well as I can, won't you?" Jeff said dryly. "In return, I'll let you play as well as you can, Dick."

"You're so good to me," Dick declared. "Get a couple of rackets, somebody. I didn't know you were an athlete, Jeff. How've you managed to keep it a secret for so many years? Did anybody around here ever see him play tennis?"

There was a negative murmur. Only Virginia Blair faintly nodded, and she was pale and all atremble.

Rackets were obtained, and the two brothers, attended by the cream of the younger Milldale set, went over to one of the courts. There were a good many humorous comments, and considerable laughter until the two boys started to play. Then the hilarity stopped as abruptly as if it had been cut off with a knife.

Dick won the first serve, and he made a point of appearing to be greatly concerned. He clowning. He pretended to be nervous. He bit his finger nails.

He grasped the racket in both hands as if it were a baseball bat. He wiped imaginary sweat from his forehead.

Jeffery contemplated him calmly, and waited for the serve.

Dick lobbed it over gently. It was the caricature of a serve. It was the kind of serve you would send to a seven-year-old child. It went up into the air in a long slow arc, and it landed neatly in the very center of the service square.

Jeffery returned it with his backhand. The gut of his racket emitted a sharp shriek as it made contact, and the ball shot like a bullet to tick the white back line. Dick had no chance at it.

There was an excited murmur in the impromptu gallery. Tilden himself could have done no better.

Dick looked surprised. He was so astonished that he did not tighten up and really begin to play until he had lost the game. And when he did tighten up and begin to play, it was too late.

Jeffery knew all about Dick's tennis weaknesses. He didn't give Dick a chance to use his leg work until later, when he was sure he had him utterly licked, then he made a ridiculous figure of his big, handsome brother—sent him galloping and ca-

vorting all over the court for balls that whizzed past him like homing bees. He made Dick look foolish.

X

TRIUMPH, at last, was his! The cheering which had at first greeted his spectacular surprise ceased before the end of the first set. One does not, after all, cheer a machine gun; and Jeffery was every bit as machinelike, as scientific, as a machine gun.

Those assembled boys and girls knew that he wasn't playing a game. He wasn't playing anything. He was a perfected machine, perfectly coördinated, that could shoot a tennis ball with deadly accuracy wherever it was aimed.

Presently the gallery was jeering the big brother.

"Thought you were going to show him up, Dick!"

"How come they let you on your college team, Dick?"

Dick got mad. He lost the second set in three lone games. Then he threw down his racket and stalked off the court.

Virginia was the first to congratulate Jeffery.

"Jeffery, you're just wonderful!"

Jeffery glanced briefly into her velvet brown eyes. They were glowing with pride, and her smile was a little tremulous.

"You'd better condole with Dick," he muttered, and left her.

The rest were crowding about him, effusing over him. One of the young men, who was a regular on the Milldale team, was pumping his hand enthusiastically.

"Kid," he cried, "I've never seen better tennis than that in my life! You are the tenth wonder of the world! If you keep up this pace, you'll make Johnston and Tilden and Richards look like beginners. How in the world did it happen, and why have you kept it such a secret?"

Before Jeffery could answer, Madeline Page was exclaiming:

"Jeff, you sweet kid, you'll play in the tournament, won't you?"

"Sure, I will—if I can make the team."

"You should worry about making the team!"

"Well, I'll go out for it," Jeffery promised seriously.

And for a week, Milldale talked of little else but Jeffery's spectacular surprise at the country club. A champion tennis player—

and no one had dreamed that he was anything but a cripple!

Only at home was the atmosphere not entirely cordial. Dick was peeved at him, and frankly called him a sneak.

"You'll never get anywhere pulling off sneaky stunts like that," Dick declared, virtuously.

"Every man," Mr. Hollings interrupted, "has the right to work things out in his own way."

He was trying to adjust himself to this new Jeffery. It was hard to put aside the contempt and tolerance of years; and Jeffery, in one dazzling afternoon, had proved himself the real bright hope of the family.

It was strange to hear Mr. Hollings around town now, bragging about Jeffery. He had never mentioned Jeffery heretofore, unless some solicitous inquiry was made pertaining to the poor child's health. And now that Jeffery was suddenly elevated to the status of hero, Mr. Hollings was both bewildered and delighted.

Jeff's new status, however, brought about no change in the situation where Virginia was concerned.

Dick recovered quickly from his ignominious defeat, but refused to go out for the team. He devoted himself more assiduously than ever to Virginia.

And the rift between Jeffery and Virginia seemed to grow wider. There was constraint when they were together; both were evasive. And Dick had apparently fallen seriously in love with her.

Jeffery's pride prevented him from bringing the matter to an issue. Virginia was indicating plainly enough that she no longer had any use for him; that she had fallen hard for Dick. Well, that was that.

The only compensation was the candid public admiration to which he had suddenly fallen heir. Such tribute repaid him, or so Jeffery believed, not only for all of the years he had been pitied and tolerated, but for the loss of Virginia. It was nice to have men cater to you; to have them look up to you and want your advice and criticism; nice to be respected and envied, instead of being patronized.

The eliminations had begun. Jeffery's bulletlike backhand, with its machine-gun speed and precision, swept away all comers. With it he shot his way swiftly to first place on the Milldale team.

His game never varied. It did not seem to be affected by his temperament. He

played always with a grim ferocity, and he never tired. If his game leg bothered him, no one was aware of it.

Then came the tournament. It began as a tournament, and it soon became a one-man show. Jeffery was the outstanding feature of the tournament. He won his way through the doubles, eliminating, eliminating.

Finally, he was face to face with the captain of the Highridge team. The first game he lost because of nervousness inspired by the large, excited gallery. Then this weakness left him, and he settled down to business.

He won the set. He won the next set, and the third. He accepted a large silver loving cup, without any emotion.

Throughout the game he had been conscious of Virginia and Richard in the gallery. She never smiled. Not once did she applaud.

He knew that he had lost her forever, and the gleaming silver cup might as well have been a handful of ashes. It meant nothing to him now. Nothing meant anything to him any more.

He had been victimized by a girl and—how he hated them all! She hadn't meant a thing she had said. He remembered the afternoon she had driven him to the parking place under the elm tree, when she had pumped him to find out whether he cared more for Lila May Saunders than for her.

She had been making a fool of him! All women, he decided, were like that. Give them a chance, and they would make a monkey out of you. Damn them all!

XI

A MONTH later Jeffery entered the State tournament preliminaries. The backhand, with its deadly backspin, brought him still another silver loving cup. His father bought a handsome mahogany cabinet and placed it in the sitting room. Here the cups were kept. Some day the cabinet would be full of cups.

In September, Jeffery faced the State champion, a cool, experienced man of thirty-two, full of gallery tricks. He would not, for example, remove his sweater to play.

His smile, in his hard, nut-brown face, frankly admitted that he didn't have to remove his sweater to play a dub like Jeffery. Boy wonders caved and fell to pieces when they had got this far.

Jeffery wore tennis shoes, white socks, light-weight duck trousers, and a white cotton shirt. That was all. Nothing underneath. He was impressed by the champion's disdain, his wearing of the heavy sweater, just as he was meant to be impressed by it all.

As usual, Jeffery lost the first game of the first set through nervousness. Then he took some one's shouted advice to get mad. He won the second game with a love score.

The champion removed his sweater. He wore a sweat shirt under that. The third game went to Jeffery with another love score. Thereupon the champion doffed the sweat shirt. He was sweating profusely by now.

Then the champion got mad himself, and played tennis as he had never played tennis before in his life—or as Jeffery had ever seen tennis played. He found that Jeffery's one weakness was the game leg. He placed his shots so that Jeffery would have to move, and move fast, to cover the court.

At the end of the first set, Jeffery's hip hurt so badly that he thought he would faint. But he didn't. He sunk his teeth into his tongue and played championship tennis. He took the next set. He took the next and the next.

Tennis fanatics loudly proclaimed him the new State champion. He accepted a still larger loving cup, went home, and stayed in bed for three days, suffering so from the bad hip that he could not sleep—and he would not take a drug to solace the pain.

But he had come through finely. It would, he knew, always trouble him, that damned hip; but he could rely on it. He would take it easy until next summer, give it a good rest; then he was going after the tennis championship of the Middle West.

Between now and then he was going to perfect that backhand until it would shave the net ten times out of ten. He must develop a game that was entirely aggressive; mustn't let his opponent get him started running.

Yet he could not look forward with eagerness to next summer, or, as a matter of fact, to anything. He would enter college in September, he wasn't sure which college, but it would not be Dick's.

But he couldn't look forward to college. The interest had all gone out of life. He didn't have a friend.

People invited him everywhere, of course. Wasn't he the tennis champion of the State? But he was more than ever suspicious of people. He was sure, now, that they were trying to exploit him because he was the State champion.

The only person in the world of whom he had ever been sure had been Virginia, and she had dropped him when a more attractive man came along.

But Jeffery's pride would not permit him to betray how she had hurt him. He saw her frequently at parties; he was always cordial and friendly, just as if nothing had happened. And Virginia treated him in quite the same way.

The situation came to an unexpected crisis at the Halloween dance at the country club. Dick danced the first four dances with Virginia.

Jeffery applied for the fifth, and she said that he could have it, but when he went to claim it, he could not find her anywhere. He went into the garden, looking for her in the unseasonably warm night, and he came upon the two of them in a nook formed by a network of vines. They did not see him.

Jeffery did not speak. They were talking—and, shamelessly, he listened. He had arrived, it appeared, at a most dramatic juncture.

XII

"No!" Virginia was saying, very sharply, indeed.

"Then I'll take one!" was Dick's equally sharp rejoinder. "I've been playing around with you all summer, and I'll be dog-goned if any other girl I ever knew would have kept me begging for a measly little kiss as long as that. Be yourself, Peachy! Anybody would think you were living in the Middle Ages."

"Why do you keep on wasting your time on me, then?" Virginia demanded. "There are loads of girls in there on the dance floor, who'll give you all the necking you crave. I don't go in for that sort of thing, and I'm not going to start."

"Look here," he said, roughly. "I'll be leaving for school in another week. I suppose you aren't even going to kiss me good-bye!"

"You guessed it right the very first time," she declared.

"I never gave a girl a rush like the one I've given you this summer," Dick an-

nounced. "I haven't let another man come near you. Virginia, honestly, I'm wild about you. You'd be a hot mamma if you'd only let yourself go. Come on, honey, snuggle up."

"I am not handing out snuggles, either," the young lady said. "And I'll be glad when you go. You've messed things up beautifully for me, Dick. You've spoiled the nicest friendship I ever had. You've acted as if you owned me all summer. You haven't let Jeffery come near me. You've got things to the point now where he won't believe a word I tell him. I think you're a dangerous man, Dick. I think you enjoy crushing fine things and hurting people. I don't think there's ever been a nicer friendship between a boy and a girl than the one you broke up between Jeffery and me."

"Oh, apple sauce!" the young man snorted.

"You think it's funny—because you get a kick out of hurting people. I was Jeff's girl when you came crashing in this summer like—"

"If he had any guts," Dick rudely broke in, "you'd still be his girl. Faint heart and so forth. And if you wanted to be his girl, you'd tell him so. You'd have told him so long ago. What's got into you, anyhow?"

"I'll tell you," Virginia replied promptly. "When you first started rushing me, you dazzled me so I didn't know where I was. I thought you were really crazy about me—"

"I am! My God, I am!"

"You aren't. Let me finish, please. I'd never had a man give me such a rush, and before I knew what was happening, the damage was done. Jeffery was hurt. Yes, he was! He was hurt beyond repair. You don't know how sensitive he is, and—"

"You think you can repair him, do you?" Dick interrupted.

Jeffery, at his listening post behind the vines, held his breath for her answer.

"I know I can," she said in a firm young voice. "I did it once, and I can do it again. I'll tell you something, Dick, but I don't believe you'll be able to understand it. Jeff's and my interest in each other isn't one of these summer romances. He's had plenty of chances to play around with prettier and snappier girls than I am, and he hasn't done it. The truth is, he needs me more than any one in the world, and I

need him even more. You think you're very superior about such things. You think love is something to joke about."

"Why not?" Dick insinuated. "After the way you've treated me!"

"Well, let me tell you that ours isn't! Jeff is going through college, and he is going to become a great man, and I'm going to make it my life job to keep him marching ahead steadily and surely. In other words, I haven't any more time for playboys like you. This summer has taught me a valuable lesson. It has taught me to appreciate sincerity and honesty and loyalty—and Jeffery."

Dick had arisen.

"Thank you," he said cheerily, "for the very lovely Sunday school lesson."

And he walked briskly down the path and left her sitting there.

Jeffery waited. He waited for perhaps fifteen seconds. Then he stepped out boldly from behind the vines. He seated himself beside Virginia and looked at her. He could hardly trust himself to speak. Breathing was enough of a task for him.

"S-swell n-night," he managed to get out.

Her eyes were swimming and her chin was trembling. He knew that her arms were going to fly around his neck, and that she was going to sob out all the woes of this summer on his shoulder.

How entrancing the moonlight had become! How bright the future! How delicious the moment!

THE STAMPEDE

THE river we sought we found dry in its bed,
And there wasn't a cloud in the sky overhead:

With no water or grass for the cattle to graze
It seemed that we'd come to the end of our days—

We had gone round the herd for the most of the night;
We had sung all our songs and were waiting for light,

Then the stampede began—to the fore, to the rear,
Our ten thousand cattle rose up as one steer.

What began it, who knows? Some night creature alone
That cried for its mate; or a hoof on a stone

Perhaps; or the stir of a stick in the dark;
Or camp fire that, dying, sent up one last spark.

Or was it some God-given instinct that stirred,
Past the knowledge of men, in the heart of the herd?

They'd been restless before and they'd wanted to run,
But we'd set them to milling before they'd begun;
Now we rode with them, breakneck, and prayed for the sun.

There were horns to the left, seas of horns to the right;
And the moon, down the west, and the stars, all in flight,

Seemed stampeding, too. On we rode! On we rode!
Each expecting to pay the last debt that he owed,
His soul—to his God! Here a prayer, oath, or shout—
But the steers only lengthened their strides further out.

Oh, the day was up clear when they lapsed to a trot,
And the plains were beginning to sizzle up, hot,

When they halted as if some command had gone back;
Each leathery yearling brought up in his track—

*Where a stream ran with water brimful to each shore
And acres and acres of grass stretched before!*

Harry Kemp

Pepper

THIS GENERATION AND ITS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSOR MEET
FACE TO FACE—AND PART IN BETTER UNDER-
STANDING IN THIS DELIGHTFUL STORY

By Reita Lambert

MR. HUBERT LOVELACE HALSEY slipped the key in the lock of his front door, entered the hallway of his justly admired suburban home, slammed the door resoundingly behind him, and tossed his hat on a chair. Then he stood quite still, panting a little—for he had walked up from the station—and defied the silence not to produce a welcoming voice.

Mr. Halsey harbored an active aversion to coming home to an empty house. He considered his daily return from town the most important feature of his day. He liked to feel that it was equally important to his family.

Mr. Halsey had the reputation of being an indulgent husband and father. That—like many other such men—he was indulgent just so long as he was indulged, was a fact known only to his family. To-day, for example, although he had arrived two trains and as many hours ahead of his customary schedule, this did not—to his mind—absolve his wife from being on hand to welcome him.

When the silence remained stubbornly intact under his challenging glare, Mr. Halsey approached the stairs, elevated his chin, and roared upward:

"Well! Anybody home?"

This produced a tap of heels and the obsequious voice of the second maid from somewhere in the upper regions.

"Mrs. Halsey has gone out, Mr. Halsey. Your daughters are out, too."

An indignant rumble was Mr. Halsey's response. He mopped his pink, smoothly shaven face and the top of his head, which was just as pink, and smoother.

Then he crossed to the mantel, where the day's mail was arranged in neat stacks

against the wall, and selected his own. On the way to his favorite chair in the living room, he shuffled the letters frowningly.

Bills. The first of the month, of course.

Now, Mr. Halsey had recently launched a dietary campaign against an excess of poundage that had overtaken him during the last decade. As a helpful measure, he occasionally exercised heroic self-control, and went without his lunch.

He had done so to-day. As a result he had spent the afternoon fighting off the melancholy that seemed to generate just beneath his slackened belt.

On the way out from town, the thought of his wife's ready approbation had comforted him. Instead of his wife, he had found bills.

In the light of his disappointment and hunger, her absence took on the color of deliberate desertion, just as his bills appeared the expression of some personally malevolent fate. By the time he had inspected his bills and computed their total, Mr. Halsey's incipient sense of injury had grown into a lusty and strapping grievance indeed.

Mrs. Halsey, coming in a few moments later, recognized this with that mystifying sagacity of wives. She sighed, and then she cried brightly:

"Why, Hubert! Early, aren't you? That is nice!" She kissed him. "Hot in town, dear?" She saw the bills in his hand, and picked up the evening newspaper. "Cooler to-morrow, it says here. Did you read about the temperature up-State?" And she thrust the paper at him.

Mr. Halsey ignored it. "I don't need to read about the temperature anywhere. If these bills aren't enough to give a man a temperature—"

"Bills!" she echoed lightly. "Well, don't look at them. We know what's in them—"

"You may! I don't. If these things don't read like the yearly bills of a fashionable boarding school instead of one month's items for a couple of young girls—"

"I suppose getting them ready to go back to school and all—"

"School!" Mr. Halsey shuffled the bills and plucked one free. "Does the school make 'em bring seventy-five-dollar evening dresses? Does—"

"Oh, but that was Pat's new party dress, dear. You remember we bought it for the Carleton's dance?"

"Seventy-five dollars!" Mr. Halsey quoted, adroitly ignoring his wife's query. "And for a mere child—"

"That's not much, as prices go—"

"Fifteen dollars for slippers," Mr. Halsey read. "Fifteen—as much as I paid for a suit of clothes when I was a young man."

"She'll wear them all next winter, of course."

"Did you ever have a fifteen-dollar pair of shoes when you were a kid? Or a seventy-five-dollar dress?"

"Of course not, but—"

"Of course you didn't. But you'll let your children have 'em. Mind, it's not the expense I'm condemning—I've been a pack horse too long to hope for any let-up now—it's the effect on their characters. Here's Pat wearing a party dress fit for a princess, before she's nineteen, and Babe's things cost almost as much. I tell you it's just such extravagance that's playing havoc with the younger generation!"

Mrs. Halsey sighed, even though she had known it was coming. It was the younger generation that invariably served Mr. Halsey as a species of snubbers against which he worked off his grievances of whatever origin. Discretion warned her to silence, but her loyalty to Pat and Babe forced her to take up the cudgels for them—which was precisely what Mr. Halsey wanted.

"My dear, this generation is no worse than any other. It's silly to make comparisons between—"

"No worse than any other! You can say that when—"

II

A ROAR blocked his words, rent the late afternoon peace, and evolved itself into the

hoarse purr of a motor directly beneath the *porte-cochère*.

"Here come the children now," Mrs. Halsey said nervously. "Please, dear, don't let them—"

Pat's voice, blithe and buoyant, rode in to them:

"By, fellas! See you sooner!"

And Babe's came, a mischievous gurgle: "Be good eggs, now, and don't get too scrambled!"

This was followed by a medley of youthful mirth, over which a persistent basso finally predominated.

"Papa love mamma?" it queried hopefully. "Hey, Pat! Hotsie love Totsie?"

Pat's clear soprano lifted in a sort of chant: "Does the little white rooster love the little red hen—" and led the response in which Babe's and two young male voices enthusiastically joined: "Ma-a-y-bee!"

Mrs. Halsey glanced at her husband's purpling face and sidled furtively, swiftly toward the door. His voice promptly dragged her back, booming triumphantly:

"No worse than any other generation, eh? Can you say that after hearing—"

"My dear, that's just the modern brand of fun." Once more she made for the door, but stopped with a little gesture of defeat before the advance of her daughters. They came hurtling through the doorway, two radiant young striplings, slim and supple limbed. Here were two of those clean-cut, clear-eyed young moderns who have reduced the art of dress to the least common denominator, and leave no more physical charms to conjecture than may be concealed beneath thicknesses of silk.

"Hello, mum!" Babe crowed. "Nearly dinner time? I could eat my foot!"

"Absolutely hello," Pat seconded, and wavered off into silence.

Mrs. Halsey saw their radiance dim as they caught sight of their father. There followed a politer edition of greeting, and then Pat announced:

"Guess I'll have a tub before dinner," and took a step toward the door—one step—before her father's roar halted her.

"Wait, please! You, too, Babe!"

"Oh—er?" Pat inquired, innocently.

"Will you be good enough to tell me," Mr. Halsey pleaded, with such gentleness that his wife shivered, "if what I just heard is a common form of leave-taking among the young people in your set?"

Pat lowered a pair of uncommonly long

lashes over a pair of uncommonly blue eyes, and earnestly inspected a pink finger nail.

"Why—what do you mean?" she asked him in a meek, small voice.

"I mean," her father explained kindly, "is it the custom for young men to inquire, upon parting from their young women friends, whether mamma loves papa?"

A sound like a firecracker fizzing issued from Babe's pursed lips, but Mr. Halsey's gaze did not waver from the suddenly rosy face of his elder daughter.

"I'm asking you if this is the custom—"

"N-no—that is—I mean—"

"It *isn't* the custom, then!" Mr. Halsey cried, and Pat saw at once that she had erred in her answer. "That lends it more significance, of course. Am I to understand that you and this young man—the one who used this phrase—are better than friends, then? Engaged, perhaps?"

"Gosh, no!" Pat moaned, horrified. "He—he didn't mean—I mean that doesn't *mean* anything, dad. It's just—"

"Doesn't mean anything! Then this boy is nothing to you?"

"'Course not. He's a good egg, but—"

"A good egg!"

Pat threw out her hands in harried supplication: "Holy foot, dad! You know—"

"I know," he echoed, breathing heavily, "that if I had ever dreamed I should have a daughter so bereft of maidenly reserve—"

"As I understand it," Mrs. Halsey interrupted, very casually, "the expression is used as just a sort of slang phrase. I don't think young people have stopped to consider—"

"That's just the point!" he thundered. "They don't stop to consider anything! They ride roughshod over every convention! This generation doesn't know what the words refinement or reticence mean! When a boy can use a phrase to a casual girl friend that, in my day, he wouldn't have used to his *fiancée*—"

"But, dad," Babe broke in boldly, "he didn't—I mean, kids don't think anything about things like that. You see—"

"They don't! Then the world's in a worse state of depravity than I supposed!"

"Really, Hubert—"

"Really what? Do you countenance such talk in your daughters? Would you have stood for my bellowing such a thing at you—even after we were engaged? Would you have bellowed back: 'Does the little white rooster love the little red hen'?"

"Why—n-no," Mrs. Halsey faltered, "but you can't compare the customs of a generation ago to—"

"Of course you wouldn't!" her husband gloated. "And you can't tell me that any young girl with the first instincts of a lady, even in this day and age, would tolerate a thing like that!"

"I admit," Mrs. Halsey said severely, "that it didn't sound very ladylike, and I'm sure Pat won't let it happen again—"

"What makes you sure? How can you be sure of anything concerning children who have had the liberty they've had? I'll wager you're not even sure where they've been to-day!"

"My dear, I know my girls wouldn't—"

"We never go out without telling mother where we're—"

"You don't! You hear that, Ella? They don't go without *telling* you. You notice she didn't say *asking*! And a girl of sixteen—"

"I'm seventeen, dad," Babe corrected, timidly, but her father snapped:

"Speak when you're spoken to, please. When I was your age, and my elders were talking, my vocabulary was limited to 'Yes, sir' and 'No, sir.'"

He pinned her drooping shingled head with his choleric gaze for a moment before transferring it to his wife.

"I don't know *why* I should be shocked or surprised. Heaven knows we've only ourselves to thank. When we deliberately pay seventy-five dollars for a child's party dress—" This drew his eyes back to Pat, and released a new faucet of indignation. "And a dress, mind you, that wouldn't have made a respectable scarf for my mother's shoulders. And that's another thing! What can we expect of a girl who goes around exposed like that? Look at those legs!"

III

MR. HALSEY looked at them. It was remarkable that he could do so and not have all other emotions swept away in sheerest admiration.

"Our dresses are no shorter than other girls'," Pat defended, and squeezed her dimpled knees together with a vague intention of making them less conspicuous.

"It's the style to wear 'em short," Babe ventured, helpfully.

"It's a style no modest girl would support," their father declared. "In my day,

if a girl had exposed herself in that fashion—well, we'd have known she wasn't the sort of girl we could introduce to our sisters. There was such a thing as modesty in those days, and, I tell you, when a girl loses her modesty—"

They listened patiently to what happens when a girl dispenses with this admirable quality. Mr. Halsey had warmed to his subject until he was quite aglow.

From modesty he passed to the other virtues enjoyed by his own generation, but scandalously lacking in this. This broadened the scope of his attack, and as it became more general and less personal, his daughters began to edge stealthily toward the door.

When they were well out of his focus, they scuttled swiftly and silently up the stairs. Once inside the room they shared, Babe inquired plaintively of her smoldering sister: "Papa love mamma?" and expertly dodged the sun-browned little fist that threatened her.

"Shut up, you poor hat, or they'll be holding an inquest over you!" Pat admonished darkly, and bounded off to her bath.

Their departure did not trouble Mr. Halsey. They had furnished an impetus which would keep him going indefinitely, and his wife could more easily follow him while he tacked back and forth from one generation to the other—yearning over the old, annihilating the new.

"I tell you there's no standard of decency any more! When young people—"

"I think you're wrong there, Hubert," his wife broke in sharply. "You forget that standards have changed. That is, you forget it where the conduct of young people is concerned. You accept other changes—the radio, airplanes—things like that."

"Who's talking about airplanes?" Mr. Halsey demanded, petulantly, irritated by this unusual forensic outburst.

"They're as much a part of the modern regime as short skirts and freer speech."

"You mean to say you approve of your daughters talking and acting like—like burlesque actresses!"

"My mother didn't approve of my riding a bicycle, but she had to adjust herself to a new era. That is what I'm trying to do."

"Riding a bicycle was a ladylike sport compared—"

"Our mothers didn't think so. They

were just as shocked as you are at some of the things the girls do."

"You think I've no reason to be shocked? You think—"

"I think you're making no allowance for natural changes," Mrs. Halsey said, impatient that she had permitted herself to be drawn into a controversy as futile as it was familiar. She had shrewdly guessed the real source of her husband's grievance—that, having forgone his luncheon, he was dining, as it were, off the younger generation.

Tactful wives are tolerant of these small weaknesses in their men folks. But to-day there was an incipient resentment deep in Mrs. Halsey's eyes—a dawning glint of fire.

"Try to look at the thing sensibly," she suggested, evenly. "Your daughters are no different than other girls of their age. You wouldn't want them to be. You wouldn't want them to be little freaks and frumps any more than I would."

"Were you a freak or a frump when you were a young girl?" Mr. Halsey brayed.

"I should certainly be considered so now if I were to resurrect myself as I was then."

"Nonsense! A lady was a lady in those days," he declared. "And while we're on that subject, I'm bringing a man out to dinner to-morrow night—a Frenchman. He's only over here for a short time, and I don't want him to carry back any wild ideas of American family life. I wish you'd see that the girls don't come to the table half naked. And if they can't speak the king's English, tell 'em they needn't talk at all."

Mrs. Halsey received these suggestions in grim silence. She knew he was hungry, that, having dined, he would revert to his usual genial self. But would that remove the blight his outburst had placed upon the spirits of his wife and daughters? Mrs. Halsey thought not, and tucked her lips together more grimly.

IV

WHEN Mr. Halsey entered his office on the following morning, he was in the best of humor. A cool breeze had come out of the north to smite the heat wave; he had slept well; he had checkmated a celebrated chess player in the club car.

And he was taking Georges Anselme home to dinner. This, according to plan and precedent, was a preliminary to saying

that he would presently be taking orders for certain commodities which it was Mr. Halsey's business to market and M. Anselme's to buy.

Promptly at five, *monsieur* was shown into Mr. Halsey's private office. He was a round little man, with a sort of corkish buoyancy about him. Mr. Halsey thought he had never seen such darting black eyes, such facile hands and shoulders, such ingenuous high spirits in any mature man.

These qualities, and an inept grasp of English, had betrayed Mr. Halsey into a slightly contemptuous opinion of *monsieur's* business acumen. But, after ten days of watching his prospective customer hop nimbly over and under the dotted line as though it were a skipping rope, he decided the little Frenchman was worthy of a real effort.

"Ah, my friend!" M. Anselme greeted him now. "This is, indeed, a pleasure! I have but now complete a letter to my wife, in which I am proud to tell her that I am to meet your charming family!" He lifted his hands and shoulders. "But why should I be surprised at such kindness? It is that your country is the most kind—the most hospitable—"

"Um—er—very good of you, I'm sure," Mr. Halsey found *monsieur's* superlatives a little embarrassing. He thought, with relief, that his wife would be more dexterous at this polite exchange. "I think we'd better step along," he said. "We've just time to make the train."

M. Anselme stepped along corkily, strewing his host's path with encomiums.

"Such a country! Such a city as this New York! So alive! So what you call—up to snuff! Paris! *Poof!* We live in the dark ages. Our people they have no pepper, as your young people say. I am entranced with the young people of America—especially your *jeune fille*—they are charming—"

He broke off to ask eagerly: "You have said you have two daughters, no?"

"Two," Mr. Halsey admitted, and supplied a modest description of Pat and Babe. M. Anselme kissed his finger tips to them, and his bright eyes grew brighter.

"And beautiful!" he supplemented his host's verbal outline. "But, of course, all your young women are beautiful. Never have I seen such beauty. And they are so brave, too; so fearless. A fine thing, too. Why not?"

"You have some pretty women in Paris," Mr. Halsey said kindly. He had always thought French women had too much nose and too little color; but the moment was one for tact.

"Pretty, yes," *monsieur* agreed—and disagreed. "*Poof!* No pepper!"

Mr. Halsey thought of his daughters' supply of that article, and chuckled to himself. Quite plainly he could see M. Anselme's impressive signature sprawled along the dotted line. Even less susceptible gentlemen had succumbed thus satisfactorily after an evening with Hubert Lovelace Halsey's delightful feminine adherents.

None of the trio was in evidence, however, when Mr. Halsey ushered his guest into the living room. M. Anselme was relieved of his hat, and nicely settled in a corner of the Chesterfield, before Mrs. Halsey appeared. He bobbed agilely to his feet, and Mr. Halsey said pleasantly:

"Ah, there you are, Ellie! M. Anselme, my dear—ah—er—my wife—"

Starting with a fine, hearty stride, the introduction limped off in confused uncertainty. It was almost, for a moment, as if Mr. Halsey was not quite certain whether the lady *was* his wife. But she was saying politely:

"How do you do?"

She extended her finger tips, and M. Anselme bent over them gallantly; but if he had intended—and he probably had—to kiss the hand of his hostess, he was deterred by the lack of any hand to kiss; any visible hand, that is. For the sleeve of Mrs. Halsey's lusterless black gown boasted a ruffled addenda that fell to her knuckles.

"We're very happy to have you with us," she told him graciously.

"Not so happy as I am to be here," *monsieur* countered promptly, but the words had a hollow sound which invited a doubt of his entire sincerity.

Both gentlemen stood while Mrs. Halsey crossed sedately to a straight-backed chair and sat down. Her husband, indeed, remained standing even after she was nicely ensconced.

He fascinatedly watched her slip a black, shirred bag from her wrist onto her lap—such a bag as had been his mother's constant companion when he was a little boy—produce a square of white, a needle and thimble, a spool of thread, and painstakingly thread the needle.

At this point he sat down, conscious, suddenly, of the silence, and of his duties as host. Twice he cleared his throat preparatory to speech, but it was M. Anselme who spoke first.

"A charming place you have here, *madame*. So—so *pastorale*, and yet not too far from the city."

"I'm glad you like it," Mrs. Halsey told him sweetly, and made a knot in her thread. "We think it rather nice."

V

MR. HALSEY knew, now, that there was something wrong. But he was like a child with a pain—he couldn't locate the trouble.

It wasn't that his wife—noted for her social gifts, her skill at putting her guests at ease—didn't talk. It wasn't entirely that, nor the fact that she was sewing.

There was something wrong with her—with her dress. It was a curious dress, a snug sack that reached from her throat to her heels. It enveloped her, so that there was really very little of Mrs. Halsey visible—save her charming face, and even that was different.

Her expression was detached and grave—sort of awe inspiring. Certainly she had inspired the sprightly M. Anselme with awe; quite clogged his beautiful flow of superlatives.

While he puzzled over these phenomena, Mr. Halsey was laboring to entertain his singularly deflated guest. A half dozen times he sent a frantic S O S to the tranquil figure in the straight-backed chair, but there was evidently something the matter with the receiving apparatus.

Save when she was directly addressed, Mrs. Halsey maintained a demure and preoccupied silence. It was with almost hysterical relief that her husband welcomed the appearance of a neat maid, who announced:

"Dinner is served."

Mrs. Halsey lifted her eyes. "Will you tell the young ladies, please, Hattie?"

Young ladies! If Mr. Halsey's eyes popped slightly at this chaste baptism of his daughters, his guest evinced only the purest joy. At the words a quiver of delight animated him, the happy light swept back into his darting black eyes. It was as though a large glass of cool lemonade had suddenly been offered a thirsty desert traveler.

"Ah, your daughters!" he exclaimed in

the fullness of his relief. "Your husband has told me of them."

"Yes?" Mrs. Halsey inquired, tucking her sewing into the black bag. "Has he, indeed? Ah, here we are!"

Mr. Halsey half arose as the young ladies materialized in the doorway, and sank back promptly into his chair. M. Anselme was on his feet, but the light in his eyes was going out like a breeze-smitten candle.

"My daughters," Mrs. Halsey was announcing. "This is M. Anselme, my dears."

Now, the entrance of Mr. Halsey's daughters into any room, however occupied, was invariably prefaced by a series of muffled giggles. And the entrance of Mr. Halsey's daughters was likely to be a little blinding to one unaccustomed to such profusion of beauty.

Yet here were Mr. Halsey's daughters, standing quietly just inside the door, their eyes lowered demurely to their feet—which were set primly at a quarter of two. And it appeared that Mr. Halsey's guest was to be startled by neither excess of charm nor beauty; for the shapely limbs and sun-browned arms of Mr. Halsey's daughters were effectively concealed by the opaque stuff of their frocks—frocks which sheathed them from wrist to throat and throat to ankle.

As they hesitated there, they might easily have illustrated one of the earlier editions of "Jane Eyre" or even "Elsie Dinsmore."

"How do you do?" Pat was acknowledging the introduction in a small, meek voice.

"Pleased to meet you," Babe murmured insincerely.

"The pleasure," M. Anselme declared gallantly, "is mine." But the words lacked the ring of truth as his eyes wandered disconsolately over that quaint pair. "Mine!" he repeated with a sigh.

"Shall we go in?" Mrs. Halsey ventured, and hung the black bag on her chair arm and led the way, the girls trotting silently behind her.

Had she said: "Shall we go in to view the corpse?" the procession could scarcely have been more melancholy. The successive shocks to which Mr. Halsey had been subjected had thrown him into a gloomy state of confusion that had quite paralyzed his conversational powers.

Moreover, Mrs. Halsey continued silent

—perfectly gracious and cheerful, but silent. This was the Mrs. Halsey whose vivacious eloquence and delicate wit had enlivened her husband's table and wooed profits into his business ledgers for twenty years!

Composedly she designated her guest's place at the table, took her seat, and dipped into the fruit cup before her. The girls followed suit.

M. Anselme, after an uneasy glance at that trio of impassive faces, sighed and tucked a corner of his napkin between the buttons on his vest. Mr. Halsey became terribly aware of the ticking of the clock, and burst violently into speech.

"M. Anselme's from Paris, you know, Ellie," he remarked, and, to his guest: "My wife and daughters are very fond of your home town."

"So?" *monsieur* queried politely. "The young ladies are travelers, then?"

He directed this toward Pat's sleek yellow head, which she raised fleetingly.

"Yes, sir," she said.

Her father coughed sharply, and took a sip of water.

"They went across with their mother last summer—did Paris up brown, according to their reports."

"So!" *monsieur* repeated a little dryly. "You found it 'gay Paree'—as you say?"

"Yes, sir," Pat said again, and spooned another mouthful.

"And Mlle. Babe, also?" *monsieur* queried dutifully.

"Yes, sir," Babe responded gravely.

Their guest, a little comforted by the platter of golden chicken that appeared at his left elbow, speared a breast and addressed his hostess.

"Paris has her charm, but she is *passé*. One has but to remain four and twenty hours in your New York to know this—as I told your husband on the train only to-night."

"I hope," Mrs. Halsey told him, with an indulgent smile, "that he remembered you were his guest."

"Madame?" *monsieur* queried a bit uncertainly.

"Mr. Halsey is devoted to the *passé*," she explained. "He disapproves of the modern trend—"

VI

AND it was now that Mr. Halsey identified the harvest of his last night's reck-

less sowing. It was now that the significance of those unrevealing frocks, the "ladylike" reserve of his wife and daughters, penetrated his consciousness.

M. Anselme was staring incredulously across the table at the face of his host, blooming beyond the candles like a feverish moon.

"So!" he said, and rapidly blinked his incredulity.

Mr. Halsey made a sound that was supposed to be a light, playful sort of laugh.

"Tut! Nothing of the sort. Mrs. Halsey is merely trying to say that I don't countenance—er—certain of the modern—er—licenses—"

"Mr. Halsey," his wife broke in sweetly, "prefers the old customs to the new."

After this there was nothing for M. Anselme but food. It was excellent food, and he made the most of it. He found he could do this and yet supply the responses his host required to carry along his halting discourse.

For Mr. Halsey realized now that if his guest was to be entertained, the responsibility was his, and he shouldered it bravely. It was warm work, made considerably warmer by his silent and attentive feminine trio.

Never adept at social badinage, to-night Mr. Halsey was rather like a farm tractor in a pansy bed. He was moist and reddened when they left the table, and followed Mrs. Halsey back to the living room.

Monsieur was moist, too, from his gustatory exertions. Shrewdly he had fortified himself against an evening in the company of this amazingly virtuous family. He was wondering worriedly whether he should be permitted to smoke, but just then his host produced cigars.

Mrs. Halsey returned to the chair with the black bag on its arm. The two girls sank silently, and, it would appear, a little dejectedly, into opposite corners of the Chesterfield. Mr. Halsey relapsed into a bleak silence.

M. Anselme watched his hostess disinter her sewing from the black bag, with utter fascination. He was remembering the horrific reports that had reached him concerning the laxity of America's younger generation, and musing a little wistfully on the unreliability of hearsay.

He was thinking, too, that if it were not for their antique and unbecoming frocks, his host's daughters might not be consid-

ered entirely bereft of beauty. Provided with a proper *couturier* and seasoned with a small dash of—what was it?—pepper; *monsieur* could envision them as not unattractive.

While these thoughts were shifting about in his mind, he was casting tentative bait into the silence which had engulfed the young ladies, and being rewarded by an unprofitable haul of "Yes, sirs" and "No, sirs." It was when Mr. Halsey saw his guest yawn furtively behind his hand, that he made his final effort as a host.

"What do you say to a little music? Wonder what WXYZ's doing to-night!" and he made a gesture toward the radio.

Mrs. Halsey received the suggestion with surprising animation.

"Music! Of course. If *monsieur* would like, I'm sure the girls would sing for him."

Monsieur declared fervently that nothing would afford him greater pleasure.

"Your American songs," he said—"I am devoted to them. They are so expressive—so full of the *joie de vie*!"

Mrs. Halsey tucked away her sewing and went briskly to the piano.

"Come, children!"

"B-but, mother—"

"I'm sure M. Anselme isn't expecting too much. Come, my dears!"

Monsieur added his entreaties, and the girls arose and reluctantly followed their mother.

"I've a couple of songs here—Mr. Halsey's favorites." She flicked open the cover of a song book.

"Mr. Halsey doesn't care for the modern music," she explained.

There ensued a whispered dialogue, in which *monsieur* thought he detected spirited protests on the part of Pat and Babe. These were vain protests, it appeared, for a plaintive chord clipped them short, and, presently, the young voices took up the melody—feebly at first, but with growing volume:

"In the gloaming, oh, my darling,
When the lights are burning low—"

There are two verses of this once popular song. At the end of the first, the girls turned prayerful eyes of entreaty to their mother.

But she said—in echo to M. Anselme's hollow "Bravo!"—"Let's have the second verse, dears!" and, to her guest: "An old song—one of Mr. Halsey's favorites."

A half snort of annoyance from Mr. Halsey was promptly drowned out by the earnest trio at the piano. It was his last protest. In bleak desolation he heard his obliging family launch "Love's Old Sweet Song."

It was during this lachrymose selection that he saw his guest covertly consult his watch beneath his coat. And Mr. Halsey was computing dully the approximate number of hours he had spent in his efforts to acquire M. Anselme's signature, when a commotion at the front door cut short both this profitless task and the concert.

VII

"HELLO, there! Anybody home? Hey—Come alive!"

It was a triumph for Mrs. Halsey that her swift advance, her stern eye of warning, quieted the wild yells of amazement which her odd appearance had excited in the callers.

"How do you do? Will you come in? May I present M. Anselme? Some young neighbors of ours, *monsieur*—Miss Ferris, Miss Susan Ferris, Mr. Craig—"

They crowded the doorway—a bouquet of bright young faces.

"We just thought," said a staggeringly lovely little thing in something pink and scanty, "we'd roll up to the club for a dance. Are the girls—"

"*Monsieur*, did you say!" This was a vivacious young beauty in blue. "That means you're French, doesn't it?"

"Ooh! Are you from gay Páree?" the vision in pink demanded.

M. Anselme, his black eyes seesawing happily between the pink and blue, bobbed and smiled joyfully.

"If it pleases *mademoiselle*, then I am from Paris, yes!"

"Don't you *love* that!" the pink apparition cried to the world in general. "Isn't he obliging? We were in Paris last year, and—"

"Oh, *monsieur*, do you know that song Delia Artois is singing at the Champs Elysée Theater? The one about the girl with the fat legs?"

"Ah, *mais oui! Mais—*" *Monsieur* exulted, and stopped suddenly with a fearful glance toward his host and hostess. He hoped he had caught himself in time.

"Isn't it a wow? And that dance she does! It has put the Charleston's nose out of joint, I say—"

"Are they doing the Charleston in Paris, now? I heard—"

"That I cannot say," *monsieur* confessed regretfully. "It is a dance I do not know. I have heard of it, but unfortunately I have—"

He caught himself again, and the blue beauty cried: "Never seen the Charleston! Holy foot! Say, you ought to get Pat Halsey—"

"Where is she, Mrs. Halsey?"

"Yeh, where are the girls?" inquired the leggy young man who had been anxiously raking the room with his eyes. "Where you hiding—"

"They were here a moment ago." Mrs. Halsey looked about gravely. "But they seem to have gone."

"To bed, probably," she added, quickly, apologetically.

"Bed!"

"Good gosh!" the young man breathed, and then: "Well, come on, fellas—better be rolling along."

Monsieur's eyes yearned after them as, chattering, they started. Then he, too, took a determined step forward, fumbling for his watch the while.

"Ah, yes. It grows late. I, too, must depart—"

"Oh, but it's quite early, really," Mrs. Halsey told him—but her protest lacked warmth.

"You are most kind, but, indeed, I must—"

"Say, we don't want to break up your party, but—"

"We'll drive him to the station, Mrs. Halsey."

"'Course, we will. There's heaps of room."

"Ah, but I could not dream—" *monsieur* protested, delightedly.

"That *would* be kind—if he must go so soon," Mrs. Halsey said graciously.

"He can sit in the rumble seat!"

"Ah, the r-r-rumble seat—enchanted!" *monsieur* murmured.

There were feverish leave-takings. In his farewell speech, M. Anselme proved that he had recaptured all his superlatives. When he trotted off in the wake of the pink and blue visions, and the leggy young man, he looked like an animated kewpie.

Mr. and Mrs. Halsey stood in the doorway while he was introduced to the rumble seat. An excited medley of voices rode back to them.

"There, isn't that as cute as the baby's new tooth?"

"I'm going to ride in the rumble with *monsieur*—"

"You are not—"

"I am, too—watch me—"

"So'm I!"

"There isn't room—"

"Who said so! Loads of room—"

"*Mais oui!*" M. Anselme trilled happily. "*Mademoiselle* is right—"

"Move over!"

VIII

MRS. HALSEY closed the door softly and went—humming gently—upstairs. At the open door of her daughters' room she paused—and grinned. In two crumpled heaps on the bright rug lay the modest frocks in which her daughters had essayed their difficult rôles—abandoned cocoons from which the butterflies had fled.

She scurried swiftly into her room when she heard her husband's step on the stairs, and was divorcing a dozen pairs of snaps—the introduction of which had metamorphosed the graceful open collar of her frock into an outdated "choker"—when he appeared in the doorway.

"Well," he said after a moment, "I suppose you think you've been rather smart."

Evidently she hadn't heard. She remarked absently:

"Well, this is the first time a guest has ever left my house at *this* hour. Really, I thought his eagerness to get away was—well, little short of crude. And the way he ogled those Ferris youngsters—after showing no more attention to Pat and Babe than as if they hadn't been in the room!"

For a moment it seemed as though Mr. Halsey was going to speak, but, after a futile effort, he left the room. When he came back, five minutes later, his eyes were haggard.

"I don't suppose it occurred to you that you were making a fool of me before my own children?" he demanded.

"What makes you think that?" his wife inquired reproachfully. "If you mean about to-night—I merely told them that you were particularly anxious to please this man—that he was probably very strict—all that sort of thing. So I let down a couple of old dresses and coached them a little—you know, just explained how young people used to conduct themselves in *our*

youth. I promised them if they'd do this for me, they might go up to the club later and dance—provided, of course, our guest left early enough."

She paused to snap an elastic on her braided hair. "I rather thought," she added thoughtfully, "that he'd be leaving early."

There was silence while Mr. Halsey removed his shoes and his collar. Then he announced:

"Those kids never took him to the station. I watched. They drove up Maple Street—"

"To the club," Mrs. Halsey guessed. "They probably took *monsieur* up to the club. Perhaps he wasn't tired after all."

Mr. Halsey *was* tired. But one may be tired without being sleepy. It was long after midnight before he relaxed sufficiently to permit sleep to have its way with him.

He was drifting gratefully off into oblivion, when a roar in the driveway below dragged him back. The roar diminished to the breathy chug of a motor, and was followed by a session of subdued chattering. Mr. Halsey's daughters had returned from their dance.

They were looking, he did not doubt, like April—like the ravishing figures some beauty-loving chef might dream of placing on a birthday cake. Mr. Halsey remembered them as they had been earlier in the evening, and moaned a little.

They were forgetting to be cautious. He could hear their young voices:

"Don't forget to-morrow night!"

"Remember your promise!"

"Forget!" a masculine voice retorted vibrantly. "Now that I have discovered you, as well ask me to forget the sun—the very stars, *mes cheries*!"

This was received with stifled mirth, then: "Bun we, George!" chirped the irrepressible Babe.

"*Au revoir, ma petite!*"

"See you to-morrow—and put a little pep in it this time!" Pat warned blithely.

"Pardon? Ah, pepper!" M. Anselme's voice exulted relievedly. "The pepper," he explained, having during the last three hours accumulated some nice additions to his stock of English phrases, "the pepper is Georges Anselme's in-between name, *mon ami*!"

And then Mr. Halsey heaved himself into a comfortable position, and went happily to sleep.

FOREVER—AND A DAY

So fair was Eve 'neath Eden's skies,
So bright the dreams at play
Within the gardens of her eyes,
With wistful brooding fey,
As if her dreams were wings, to rise
Forever and a day.

And Helen gazed o'er sapphire seas
Where honeyed breezes blow,
Nor recked of embers and of lees
That age shall ever know,
For youth was hers and its heartsease:
But that was long ago.

Forever wings the moth, and rust
Corrodes the house of clay:
Eternally the wintry gust
Sweeps somber skies of gray,
While radiant love and scarlet lust
Are ghosts of yesterday.

The years drift down like withered leaves,
The gods know why and how:
The sunlight 'mid the shadow weaves
A wreath of dreams for brow
Of spring ere toil and harvest sheaves:
And youth is here—and now.

Olin Lyman

A Big Four Failure

A ROMANCE OF OLD TICKFALL—A MATRIMONIAL CONSPIRACY
WHICH DULY ENDED IN MATRIMONY, BUT NOT QUITE
AS PLANNED BY THE CONSPIRATORS

By E. K. Means

THE Big Four of Tickfall sat in attitudes of deep dejection around a pine table in the soft-drink emporium called the Henscratch. It was hard to ponder on nihility in the August heat, which scorched the meadows, played in dust devils upon the highway, and came through the open windows of this hangout of the sons of rest like the blast from an open furnace door.

"Dis here council meetin' oughter declare a holiday an' a vacation fer de rest of de summer," the Rev. Vinegar Atts complained. "I'm a fat nigger, an' I feels like I's fryin' in my own fat dis hot summer."

"Don't 'pear like it's wuth while meetin'," agreed Pap Curtain, a tall yellow man with a monkey face. "We ain't had no bizness fer de las' three days. Too hot fer young folks to fall in love, too hot fer married folks to fuss an' fall out, too hot fer a nigger to git into devilmint. I never seen such a dern decent town! Nobody ain't called on us fer advices about nothin'."

"Whut about dat new coon whut is come to town?" Figger Bush asked, pushing back the thick mop of wool on his head which made him look always like he was scared and ready to run.

"Too hot fer travelin'—nobody ain't come," Pap Curtain snarled. "Whut do dis new coon look like?"

"Ain't seed him," Figger Bush replied, as he took a handbill from his hip pocket and spread it open upon the table. "He calls hisself a dorctor."

The four men bent above the handbill and read:

DR. R. GULLEDGE, M.D.

Eighteen or more years of great study God have plan me a Great Medecine for Man and

Beaste, it is Bark and Roots and Leafs. I have cured a hunderd cases of Diffen Disease an I can cure you. one bottled will con vience you. It is a Great God Sent Medcine. I advice ever woman an man to try it. Make no differ whut you complaint is it will cure you. I can send you a thousand tesimonies ef you rite for them. Make no differ what your complaint God has give me a healing powder to cure enny complaint that you wus not born of. Get a Gentle Home treatment of the Best Fresh Hurbs.

DR. R. GULLEDGE, M.D.

"Dar now!" Vinegar Atts exclaimed. "Us is got a nigger doctor in town, an' ef he kin cure any complaint, us colored folks ain't never gwine git sick an' die no more. Pap Curtain, de gravedigger, is outen a job!"

"I never made much money diggin' nigger graves," Pap grinned. "All niggers is slow die."

"How come dat cullud pusson ain't come to see us?" Skeeter Butts inquired.

"Mebbe he don't know whar we stays at," Figger suggested.

"Hush!" Vinegar Atts said in a low tone. "Here comes a nigger now whut looks like he's sufferin' from a complaint he ain't born of."

They watched the man who had come in as he stopped at the counter to buy a bottle of pop from Little Bit. He was a flat-faced, middle-aged man, dressed in the torn and patched garments of the farm laborer. He drank his pop moodily, and then came to the table where the four men were seated.

"Kin you fellers gib a few advices to a pore cullud man whut has troubles?"

"Is you got troubles?" Pap asked.

"Shore I'm got," the man replied.

"Explode 'em, Stogie," Skeeter said cordially. "We'll advice you to de best of our knowledge an' expe'unce."

"Well, suh, it's like dis—me an' Tishue Toole wus courtin' steady like, an' we wus gittin' along fine. Den it 'pears like I had bad luck, because I had to witness ag'in' Tishue's pap in dat bootleg case. De cotehouse sont ole Pop Toole to jail, an' seems like pop sot dar in de jail house an' hated me scandalous, an' now he brags his brags dat I cain't marry no gal of hisn."

"Do Tishue side wid her paw in dat?" Vinegar asked.

"I dunno," Stogie muttered. "Of co'se, dey had oughter know dat when de cotehouse kotch me an' put me on de witness stan', I had to tell whut I knowed."

"Pop is a dangesome nigger," Figger Bush commented. "He mought slide a load of bird shot into you."

"Dat would be a good idea," Pap Curtain remarked. "I'll dig Stogie a large, deep grave, an' Vinegar kin preach him a real nice funeral, an' Skeeter an' Figger kin sing a duet over his corp', an' Tishue kin wear black mournin' an' set on de mourners' bench at de Shoofly—"

"Naw! Positively not!" Stogie howled. "I don't crave to hab nobody love me atter I'm dead. Whut do I git out of arrangements like dat?"

"You'll git a fun'ral an' a buryin', an' dat 'll be yo' big red-letter day," Vinegar Atts told him.

"I ain't in favor of it," Stogie said obstinately.

The four men smoked in silence, wondering what next to suggest. Flies buzzed about their heads. A hound trotted through the room, sniffed at them, and passed out, turning up his nose as if he did not like the odor. Across the street a parrot which had once been the property of a college boy, was shrieking a fine imitation of a college yell, uttering the words:

"I like oysters, raw, raw, raw!"

A herd of hogs that were summering under the building and holding a peace conference, became involved in a noisy controversy of squeals and grunts. Skeeter Butts, familiar with this occurrence, raised a loose plank in the floor, hurled a pop bottle at the noisy disputants, and howled:

"Hi, dar! Shut up!"

Peace restored, the men resumed their discussion.

"I figger it out dis way," Vinegar Atts began. "Ef Stogie ain't willin' to git hisself kilt, why couldn't he git hisself mighty nigh kilt?"

"It mought hurt too bad," Stogie protested earnestly.

"Don't be so obstinit," Vinegar snapped. "Us is tryin' to he'p you, an' you kicks at eve'y notion we gits."

"Whut you fixin' to do to me?" Stogie asked.

"My idear is dat Stogie mought be ridin' his mule in front of Tishue's house, an' dat mule could begin to cut up an' pitch him off, an' he could git all hurt on his insides an' his outsides—"

"Dar now!" Skeeter Butts interrupted in a voice like a burst of applause. "Ain't dat a noble notion? Us four kin happen along jes' at de time of de sad accidunt, an' we kin tote Stogie in Tishue's house an' lay him on de bed, an' Tishue will hab to wait on him fer about six months—"

"An' we'll git dis here new nigger doctor whut has jes' moved to town to visit him an' gib him some med'cine," Figger Bush broke in, as he sprang to his feet and began to search his pockets. "Whut am I done wid dat abbertisement I had on me jes' now?"

"Shore!" shouted Vinegar Atts. "Don't git no white doctor in on dis! White folks don't ketch on to nigger ways, an' dey makes a mess of our fixin's. Whut Stogie needs is to git cured by Gulledge wid a gentle home treatment."

"All right!" Stogie grinned. "When do my mule cut up an' throw me off?"

"Right now!" Skeeter Butts snapped. "Go git yo' mule now! When you pass de Henscratch, we'll fall in behime an' mosey along slow, an' be handy to he'p you when you falls."

II

TEN minutes later Stogie Starns passed the Henscratch, grinned at his fellow conspirators, and rode his sleepy, aged mule slowly down the road, in order that the four men walking behind him might not be too far away when the accident happened. Right in front of the log cabin in which the Tooles lived, Starns leaned forward, lifted the rear of the saddle, and slipped a cocklebur under the pad. When he leaned back, the aged mule woke up with a loud bawl and got busy, trying to imitate the Mother Goose cow who jumped over the moon.

Stogie Starns staged a good fall. He landed in the middle of the dusty road, sprawled face downward in the sand and

dirt, rolled over and over, as if hurled by his momentum, and lay still. The Tickfall quartet from the Henscratch ran to his aid, and made a great "miration" over the accident, calling for help, and shouting orders to one another.

Tishue Toole came out of the cabin and leaned against the fence. She was a handsome black girl, corpulent and lazy, her eyes having a perpetual sleepy droop, and her lips a constant smile of content and good humor.

"Is de ole fool dead?" she asked the men who were working over Stogie's apparently senseless form. "Fotch him in de cabin an' le's see kin we do anything fer him. A nigger whut ain't got no more sense dan to ride a gray mule had oughter git kilt. A gray hoss an' a gray mule—dey is nachel-bawn onreliables."

"He's livin' yit, Tishue," Skeeter Butts chattered. "His heart is knockin', an' he's suckin' air, but he's bad skint an' covered wid dust, an' mebbe some of his bones is fractioned."

"Tote him in!" Tishue commanded.

The four men conveyed the prostrate form into the house and placed Stogie on a bed in the rear room.

"Take off his clothes, an' I'll git you some turpumtime liniment to rub on him," the girl said.

By the time she returned, Stogie was undressed and under the covers, and the four men were standing around the bed in attitudes of anxious solicitude. Tishue stood in the doorway and handed Vinegar a bottle of pale, brown liquid.

"Rub him down good, revun," she said.

At this moment old Pop Toole came in, smiling with great satisfaction.

"I shore expe'unce joy in seein' you in dis shape, Stogie!" he said cordially. "It 'll gimme pleasure to sot up wid you an' watch you suffer. You's mighty nigh fixed to suit me. Of co'se, I would like it better ef you had some mo' skin scraped offen you, an' a few bones broke. All de time I wus in jail I wus hopin' somepin bad an' hurtful would happen to you, an' now de good Lawd done gimme my satisfaction an' gib you yo' come-uppance!"

Stogie uttered a howl, as if he were suffering intense pain.

"Dat sounds good to me—music in my years," Pop Toole grinned. "Figger, you go atter de doctor. Pap Curtain, you pick up all of Stogie's clothes an' fotch 'em out

to me. Stogie ain't in his right senses, an' he might put on his clothes to-night an' ramble off an' git lost. I'll hide his clothes till he gits plumb well."

Figger hastened from the house with a broad grin on his face, and went to the recently opened "office" of Dr. R. Gullledge. He came back to the cabin in a little while, with a dazed expression on his face, walking wabbly, like a drunken man, and accompanied by a colored person who weighed nearly three hundred pounds.

Dr. R. Gullledge was a woman. Her first name was Rachel.

She entered the room where the injured man was lying on the bed and squealing like a pig caught in a gap. The place smelled strongly of turpentine, for Skeeter and Vinegar had taken great delight in rubbing the horse liniment upon Stogie, making special applications where the skin was scraped off, and giving the patient something to howl about. They smeared some on his head, because they insisted that something ailed his head. They spilled some on the floor, and a little on the bedcovers, because the patient had "cut up," and they had to struggle with him. No one could complain that they had not been liberal in the application of the remedy.

Dr. Rachel Gullledge entered with a professional air, opened a satchel, and produced a box of powders—her "gentle home treatment of the best fresh herbs." Opening one of the papers that contained a dose of her "great God-sent medicine," she made Stogie open his mouth and stick out his tongue, while she poured the powder upon that protruding member.

"Ef he hadn't lit on his head, he would hab been kilt, sister," Vinegar Atts informed her. "We rubbed some turpumtime on his topknot, and you done put some powder on his tongue, an' now whut do we do' nex'?"

Dr. Rachel Gullledge looked at the colored clergyman, and her tiny eyes twinkled in the rolls of facial fat. Figger Bush had informed her of her part in the program, and she acted it well.

"Keep him puffedekly quiet in bed fer three days, an' don't let him eat no vittles whutsomever," she instructed them. "Don't gib him nothin' but water, an' I'll come in frequent an' see how he do."

Dinner time came, and old Pop Toole and his daughter ate, but it was only twelve

o'clock for Stogie. Supper time came, and Stogie could smell the savory cooking and hear the rattle of the dishes, but there was no nourishment for him except a drink of water, another dose of the gentle home treatment of the best fresh herbs, and a professional call from Dr. Gulledege.

The sufferer expected Skeeter Butts or some one of the four to bring him something to eat and slip it to him through the window during the night; but no such idea entered the heads of his friends, and Stogie decided that they had heartlessly abandoned him to starvation. He could easily have slipped out of the window and gone home, except for two things—his clothes had been taken away from him, and every negro's cabin is guarded by from one to seven dogs. Not being acquainted with Pop Toole's dogs, Stogie did not dare to climb out of the window and walk among them in the night and in his bare shanks. He was as securely incarcerated as if he were in jail.

The next morning Skeeter came to see the patient, solicitously inquiring as to his welfare with shameless hypocrisy. Then, with a great ceremony of secrecy, he slipped Stogie a ham sandwich about the size and thickness of a silver dollar, containing a fragment of ham sliced as thin as a cigarette paper. He also gave him one candy mint, "to settle his dinner." That was all.

Stogie laid them both on his tongue, and "took 'em," just as, a few minutes later, when his female physician called, he took a dose of Gulledege's concoction of bark, roots, and leaves; and that was all the nourishment the invalid received that day. He declared that he was completely cured, demanded his clothes, and insisted that he must leave his bed and return at once to his duties on his little farm; but Pop Toole told Dr. Gulledege that Stogie was delirious. The doctor contradicted this diagnosis, and asserted that he was merely "out of his head," saying that sometimes her healing powder had that effect for the first few days.

When Skeeter returned to the Henscratch and told his friends of his visit, there was great hilarity. It was decided that during the day each of the others should call and offer sympathy, the last caller to be the Rev. Vinegar Atts, who was to proffer the consolations of religion.

"By de time he has starved all day, he's

gwine need de benefits of clergy," Pap Curtain said.

"Shore!" agreed Vinegar. "I'll tell dat coon dat he is described perzackly in de Bible."

"I didn't know any cullud pussons was mentioned in de Scripture," Skeeter said.

"Stogie Starns is," declared Vinegar. "Listen to dis here message," he continued, drawing upon his stock of Biblical lore:

"Ef a brother or sister be naked an' destitute of daily food, an' one of you say unto dem, 'Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,' notwithstanding ye gib them not those things which are needful fer de body, whut doth it profit?"

"Lawd! Lawd!" Skeeter exclaimed in superstitious awe. "Us started out to play a prank an' git Stogie Starns married, an' now we done landed him in de Holy Bible!"

III

ABOUT six o'clock that day, Pop Toole came to the Henscratch and surprised the Big Four by his petition.

"I ain't object to Stogie stayin' in my house, brudders. In fack, I done got a heap of pleasure watchin' de mis'ry of de coon whut tes'ified ag'in' me an' got me put in jail."

"Us is glad we donated to yo' happiness," Vinegar declared, cordially. "Dat's whut us four is fer—to make folks happy."

"But now I craves to git Stogie out of my house," Pop continued. "He ain't sufferin' no mo', an' he acks awful happy an' contentedlike to me, so I figger he's cured."

"How do he be happy when dis am de second day he ain't et nothin'?" Figger Bush wanted to know.

"He's gittin' somepin to eat," Pop Toole told them. "Lady folks ain't gwine let nothin' go hongry too long."

"Nachelly you cain't blame Tishue fer feedin' him on de sly," Skeeter Butts remarked thoughtfully.

"Yes, suh, an' I'm kinder ashamed of de way I acted todes 'em when de jail house got me. I wants you to he'p me fix 'em up so dey will elope off to-night."

The Big Four gave a gasp of surprise.

"When Stogie goes, I wants Tishue to go wid him," Pop Toole continued.

"Good Lawd, Poppy!" Skeeter Butts exclaimed. "I never heard of a nigger gittin' generous so soon like dat!"

"De Lawd is done wucked a miracle!"

cried Vinegar Atts. "We done landed Stogie in de middle of de Bible, an' Pop Toole is done got religion!"

"Naw, suh, 'tain't dat," Pop Toole hastened to explain. "You see, I done fell fer dat female doctor. Ef I kin git Tishue out of my cabin, an' pussuade Dr. Gullledge to marry me an' come in my cabin, me an' her kin make a heap of money bootleggin' her great Gawd-sent med'cine."

The four gave a whoop of applause. Then Skeeter protested:

"But you ain't hardly know dis here Gullledge, pop."

"She done called at my house frequence-ly to see her sick patient," said Pop Toole. "I'm looked at her real good, an' conversed her some. I ain't need to eat a whole barrel of sugar to see ef it is sweet. I kin take a little taste an' know fer suttin an' shore."

"We'll pull dis off in great style, brud-ders," Vinegar Atts announced joyously, after he had recovered from his surprise. "We'll fix up de most sensational weddin' in Tickfall's cullud social circles."

"Shore!" Pap Curtain agreed. "A man an' his gal daughter bofe aimin' to git married! De Big Four will kill two rats wid one rock."

Then Vinegar Atts rode Stogie's mule out to the cabin where he was invalidated, tied the animal to a tree, and purposely forgot to ride the mule back to town. He told Stogie that they had arranged everything to get him married that night, and that all he had to do was to wait until he heard a hoot owl in the old pecan tree. Then he could walk out of the house in perfect safety, and he and his girl could mount the mule and ride away.

"I will be de hoot owl," Vinegar explained. "We will hab ole Pop Toole out of de way whar you won't git in no danger."

"Dat suits me," Stogie replied, grinning broadly. "You-all ain't been as nice to me as you might been, cuttin' out my eats an' all; but I'm glad you is showin' up noble at de end."

"We knowed de lady folks would come to yo' rescue, Stogie," Vinegar explained easily. "Dis whole accidunt wus planned to git yo' gal to int'rust her mind in you agin."

"I been fed high, an' I'm feelin' a heap better," Stogie told him.

While Vinegar was walking back to town,

he conceived a new idea. He came into the Henscratch bustling with excitement.

"Us ain't exconise much good sense in dis bizness, brudders," he proclaimed. "Nobody ain't doin' no heavy thinkin' but me. I moves we git our guns an' shoot de love birds off."

"Whut a noble notion!" Skeeter Butts laughed. "I ain't shot off a bride an' groom since Pap Curtain got married de fourth time."

"Us kin string out along de lane, an' I'll make de hoot owl sound an' do de fust shootin'," Vinegar announced. "You-all kin pick 'em up wid yo' guns as dey ride by."

"Don't tell Pop Toole nothin' about it," Pap Curtain warned them. "Pop is gittin' ole an' fibble in his mind, an' he might git keerless wid his gun."

"Suttinly fer a fack," Skeeter Butts agreed. "He mought shoot de stuffin' out of us. Dese ole gray-head monkey niggers is risky!"

IV

THE night was one of those sultry, starless, fog-hung periods of torture that make cotton grow and human beings suffer, discourage the damage of insects to the growing crops, and offer no relief for man or beast by puff of wind or drop of cooling rain from sundown to sunrise. Hidden beside the long lane that led to the main highway, the men panted from the heat, fought with mosquitoes, and restlessly fingered some kind of firearm. It was near midnight. They heard the hoot of an owl near the pecan tree beside the Toole cabin, and were glad to know by this signal that the fun would soon begin.

Bang, bang, bang! Vinegar Atts came into action with his big automatic shotgun, and six shots shattered the profound silence. There was the patter of flying feet in the soft dust, and two hundred yards down the road Skeeter Butts emptied his automatic pistol, ten shots in ten seconds, firing in the air. A brief interval, and the fusillade began afresh as the gray mule passed Pap Curtain with his load of love. Then Figger Bush concluded the fireworks by emptying a repeating shotgun into the darkness above him; so a good time was had by all.

The promiscuous firing aroused old Pop Toole from his slumber. It woke up all the hound dogs in that section of the town,

and started them howling hysterically. Then the old man, cursing and bawling, made a discovery which caused him to seize his old muzzle-loading shotgun and run out across the yard, with a pack of delirious hounds baying at his heels.

Unable to see in the darkness, Pop Toole fired in the direction of the sound as it moved down the road. The splattering bird shot flushed four black men from their hiding places, and the next discharge of the old muzzle-loader splashed harmless lead over four frightened men and a pack of hounds whose voices indicated that they were on the verge of insanity.

Since Pap Curtain got married the fourth time, promiscuous shooting of firearms in Tickfall at night had become a fire signal. The night watchman, hearing the guns, ran to the courthouse and began to ring the bell, and the watchman at the saw-mill pulled a cord and started a shrieking siren. Tickfall woke up, looked for the fire, grumbled about the false alarm, and went back to bed. The Big Four, appalled at the disturbance they had caused, pursued their several ways to their habitations, praying that the white folks would never suspect them of having anything to do with the events of the night.

Next morning, as the Big Four sat in the Henscratch in a somewhat fearful and chastened mood, the door opened and Stogie Starns entered.

"I thanks you-all fer givin' me such a good send-off, brudders," he said. "It wus kinder noisy, but we didn't mind dat at all."

"You shut up about dat noise," Skeeter snapped. "Us might git into trouble."

"I especk you done is," Stogie told them. "When I roused up de clerk to git my weddin' licenses, he axed me whut dat shootin' wus, an' I up an' told him. De white judge dat married us axed me whut dat shootin' wus, an' I up an' told him. De night watch met up wid us comin' down de street, an' he axed me whut dat shootin' wus, an' I up an' told him; an' all of 'em said dey wus gwine hab you four niggers arrested fer disturbin' de peace!"

"Oh, Lawdy!" Vinegar Atts wailed. "An' I wus de heavy thinker whut thunk up dat notion! Us is done made a awful failure outen dis mattermony mess!"

"Naw!" Stogie protested. "Me an' my gal got married all right, an' I am

shore she is gwine make me prosperous an' happy."

"Git out, Stogie!" Vinegar Atts whooped. "You pester my mind so I cain't think. I'm done got troubles of my own. In jail fer disturbin' de peace—oh, Lawdy mussy!"

When Stogie passed out, the four men had barely turned to the consideration of their own predicament when the door opened and Pop Toole entered. The conspirators stared at him with the utmost astonishment.

"My good gawsh, pop!" Skeeter Butts exclaimed. "Whut ails yo' hands an' face, an' whut in de name of mud is de matter wid yo' head? You is changin' color. You don't look niggerfied no more."

"I fell over a houn' dawg las' night, an' skunt my hands an' mashed my face an' bumped my head an' broke my ole shotgun half in two at de breech," Pop Toole replied, grouchy. "Den I went into de house an' hunted up dat bottle of turpumtime you niggers rubbed on Stogie, an' I made a little mistake. Whut I got wusn't pure turpumtime. It wus furniture varnish dat Tishue painted her ole bureau wid. I'm been changed to a mahogany nigger. It didn't show up till I got in de sunlight dis mawnin', but now I looks like somepin in a show. I wus shore keerless!"

"Yes, suh, an' you wus shore keerless wid dat ole gun las' night, too," Pap Curtain snarled. "You mighty nigh shot us up an' kilt us all."

"Dat's whut I tried to do, an' I wish I had," Pop Toole responded viciously.

"Bless yo' dear ole heart fer dem few kind words, pop!" said Pap Curtain. "Now, when we git arrested fer disturbin' de peace, we pleads in cote dat you wus tryin' to kill us, an' we had to shoot in self-defense!"

"Praise de Lawd!" Vinegar Atts whooped.

"I didn't aim to do you no favor," Pop Toole told them frankly. "I'm powerful sorry you ain't all dead."

"How come?" Vinegar Atts asked in a perplexed tone. "Ain't we took Tishue offen yo' hands? Ain't de way open fer you to marry de fat sister of de Gawd-sent healin' powders?"

"Naw!" Pop said, disgustedly. "De nigger woman dat eloped off 'straddle of dat gray mule wid Stogie wus dat female doctor! Dey wus married las' night!"

The Lady Who Laughed

THIS YOUNG LOCHINVAR MISREAD THE SIGNPOSTS AND
TRAVELED WEST, BUT CUPID HAS A COMPASS
TO SET A LOVER'S COURSE ARIGHT

By Dorothy Kay

PETER regarded a tea cake gloomily. "I suppose I should have known when I told you the story," he said stiffly, "that it would have more than two million circulation weekly."

Phyllis stared.

"My dear Pete, it was priceless! Haven't you learned in all these years that I am at the mercy of a funny story? It was a matter of self-preservation. I found myself cast on a conversational desert island with a monosyllabic dinner partner. A drowning woman will clutch at any straw. It so happened that you were it."

The tea cakes were very ornate. Peter shuddered at them. He was quite patiently beyond the solace of food.

"I can see that it is particularly ungallant of me not to have fancied being the straw," he said coldly. "However, so much for that. Put it down as experience, if you care to. 'I learned about women from her.' At any rate, I'm through. As a matter of fact, I've known I was through for some time. I've been fighting the knowledge."

"Through with women?" Phyllis queried. "Oh, Petey, not that old line! Something has certainly imperiled your power of sparkling repartee. May I make so bold as to point out that you're inexcusably trite this afternoon? Cheerio, my lad. Smile for the pretty lady. Want to shake your own tea?"

"Nothing for me," Peter said coolly. "Please."

He shook his head at the tea cakes. They oppressed him just now.

"Trite I may be. There are worse things. I'd no intention of jumping through conversational hoops for you this

afternoon. I've already done a bit too much of that. I find myself utterly weary of iron innuendoes in velvet voices. When I say through, I do not necessarily mean through with women, but through with this set, that is to say, your type. Do I make myself clear?"

Phyllis ate a tea cake, and considered the matter.

"More or less," she affirmed. "Would it be too much to ask, Petey, while we're on the subject, that you define what you consider to be my type?"

"Not at all," Peter murmured. "It would make me very happy. By your type, Phyl—my apologies for triteness, but the subject has been pretty thoroughly handled—I mean the pretty pampered pet, the elaborate and useless, the fashionable and flippant. I came back hoping against hope that something might have changed you. As a matter of fact, you are, if possible, more heartless, soulless, brainless than before."

"Ooh," Phyllis mourned. "That last one was a dirty dig. Oh, my poor brain, or whatever it is I use for substitute! I will say, Peter, that you are refreshingly frank."

"You asked me, you know," Peter reminded her, smoothly. "May I say in closing that your slogan is 'Save the surface and you save everything'? In fact, the whole bunch of you remind me rather compellingly of those gilded weeds they use for winter bouquets."

Phyllis held her head.

"My dear Pete! I am only a poor weak woman. One idea at a time, and that slowly. Your rhetoric leaves me gasping. I can't help but feel that it would have

been more manly had you merely said quite simply and frankly:

"I do not like you, Dr. Fell.
The reason why I cannot tell."

"Ah, but I do like you," Peter said, with a careful evenness. "As a matter of fact, I've been in love with you for a number of years, as, of course, you very well know."

Phyllis leaned back among her cushions and made her eyes large and round with surprise.

"Am I given to understand that you are proposing to me?" she begged in a very small voice.

"Not at all," Peter replied firmly. "Nothing is farther from my intention. Although I am, as I said, in love with you, it is against my own better judgment. I do not in the least approve of you. And, to make the matter more final, you don't care for me."

In spite of himself, his voice curled up suddenly at the end of his smooth sentences—like a question mark. There was a small silence, which beat like a drum in Peter's ears. He arose.

"Well, that's that. Which brings me to the point of my call this afternoon. I'm on my way to the West."

II

PHYLLIS's glass shook a little. She set it down.

"West, Petey? How utterly fitting. 'The great open spaces,' isn't it? And I seem to remember that the handclaps are always well spoken of."

"I'm hoping," Peter said gently, "that the women will be a little more sincere and worth while, a little more—er—sympathetic. I met a Western girl in France. She was rather splendid. Athletic"—he let his gaze rest briefly on Phyllis's expensive fragility—"with a magnificent presence, rather like a—a—"

"Like a haystack?" Phyllis suggested, helpfully. "Or an ungilded weed?"

"She was quite simple and natural," Peter declared, ignoring these thrusts, "as the Lord made her."

"Oh," Phyllis lamented. "*Mon pauvre* Peter! These simple, natural women, if you ask my opinion—"

"You'll pardon me if I point out that I haven't?" Peter suggested.

He found his hat.

Phyllis regarded him fixedly. Her lips smiled.

"Shall I see you at the Driscolls' to-night? The incomparable Miss Phyllis Sayre, escorted by the faithful Ted Traversers, will be unusually charming and distinguished in a new scarlet sequin dinner frock."

"She would be," Peter agreed smoothly, although he winced at the mention of his rival's name. "Sorry that I shan't be there to hold the bouquets, but I'm in rather a rush to be off."

Phyllis's eyes were very bright. Her cheeks were very pink through her lavender powder. Peter thought, unhappily, that she had never looked more desirable.

"I'm sure I hope you'll find her," she offered, agreeably.

"Her?" Peter asked with a quite elaborate surprise.

"The haystack person," Phyllis explained, coolly. "The one with the iron handclasp and the brain with the big open spaces."

"Oh," Peter said, casually—"oh, yes, I hope I shall."

He shook hands with her in careful conventionality.

"I shall miss you, Pete," Phyllis announced deliberately.

Peter attempted to smile carelessly.

"Yes?" he remarked. "That's very interesting. However, I should prefer that there be no moaning of the bar, if it's not too much to ask."

Phyllis turned suddenly and hid her face in the chintz curtain. Her slim shoulders shook. A contrite Peter was at her side in a moment.

"Phyllis," he begged, "I'm the most colossal brute. I didn't think you cared—I—you—"

There was a small silence. It beat in Peter's ears like a drum.

Then Phyllis turned her face toward him. It sparkled with mischievous mirth.

"Sorry, Petey," she mocked, "but that smile of yours was too much for me—so funereal—like a set piece—Lips Ajar."

Peter was very white.

"I understand," he said, in a cold rage. "Very humorous. Material for many a side-splitting story. I quite see that."

He opened the door.

"I believe," he said, somewhat unsteadily, "that you would laugh at a corpse. As a matter of fact, you are laughing at a

corpse. I wish you to understand that any feeling I may have had for you is dead—absolutely dead.”

He slammed the door. From the window, Phyllis watched him leap into his car and dash out of sight. She hid her face in the chintz curtain. Her shoulders shook—

III

PETER prepared to go West immediately, in a splendid iconoclastic frenzy. With a masterly completeness, he left behind him the effete East.

He left behind him his expensive apartment, his expensive wardrobe, his expensive valet, his expensive friends, all the expensive impedimenta of his glittering artificial world.

He left behind him the study of the law which he now regarded with a shuddering distaste as no more than the labored, inescapable, inconsequent unraveling of so many tinsel threads.

With these inclusive gestures, he put the East from him. In shining flivver and spotless khaki, he went forth, seeking the West.

He found it convenient to leave Boston by way of the Beverly Driscolls. All his little world would be swinging past on the other side of those ten drawn shades. The long room would be filled with a flutter of bright figures, as gay, and, somehow, as inconsequent as a flung handful of colored confetti.

It would be rather climactic if the tenth drawn shade should suddenly snap up to reveal Phyllis whirling by, slim and exotic in a scarlet sequin frock, like a bright blown flame. Her short black hair would be a shining satin cap about her small head. Her outrageously scarlet lips would be curving.

She would be smiling up at this unspeakable Ted. Peter had never liked the fellow.

The tenth shade did not snap up. A very little, very bright light spilled under its edge like scattered scarlet sequins. For some reason, Peter found himself unable to leave this scattered scarlet behind him.

As might have been expected, Peter's story traveled faster than he. The newspapers had euphemistic headlines, such as "Son of Late Millionaire Steel Magnate Seeks Simple Life." This Peter did not know, by reason of the fact that the things he had left behind included newspapers.

From time to time he made laudable, but unsuccessful attempts to define his own attitude. He perceived dimly that the West he longed for was not a matter of geography. He sought a splendid, shining thing.

He sought— He could not find words to explain to himself just what he was seeking.

It was a high day when Peter discovered the tourist camps. All about him stretched the unstudied sincerity of khaki knickers and little tents. The West!

There was a pleasant group of ladies, all very plump, and wearing bathing suits which did a frank nothing to disguise this simple, natural fact. They could be seen casually drying straight, damp bobbed hair.

"No marcel's here, no artificiality," Peter told himself vigorously, while some inextinguishably correct corner of his mind refused to be enamored of these simple fat souls whisking their damp scalloped hair.

But, after all, the ladies were from the East. They proclaimed it from the tent tops—"Iowa."

Admittedly, Peter's spirits flagged a little after his tenth tourist camp. For some reason, he could not bring himself to enjoy the frank, open ablutions of the true tourist.

It was a disturbing thing to find that he regarded with a positive distaste the circle of little eager childish faces which closed about him to applaud his facial drolleries as he brushed his teeth at the stationary wash bowl.

Ah, the little eager children! The first little tourist child that Peter met refreshed his soul.

She wore a scanty checked apron with great open spaces, and played joyously with an old tomato can at the end of a dirty string. Where could you find a parallel in the effete East?

The young sophisticate usually demanded, and was dissatisfied with, intricate electric trains and absurd elaborate dolls. Peter dwelt lovingly upon the refreshing charm of child life in the raw with an old tomato can tied to it.

The little one looked up and saw Peter. She gave a shrill delighted cry, and whirled the strung tomato can with an admirable accuracy against the face of her admirer.

Something primitive in Peter reared its head. He spanked the little simple child

with great thoroughness. Then he looked about him avidly for more spankings.

He wanted to spank all the fat, bobbed, khaki ladies. He wanted to spank the world. Instead, he put a sinister antiseptic patch on his bleeding cheek.

IV

AFTER the manner of all tourists, Peter looked upon California as ultimate—the Golden State—the Land of Promise. He knew and revered all the California captions. Surely in California he would find a solution. Of what? He was unsure.

It was rather a wrench to find southern California as white and empty as a china cup. The telegraph wires stretched across the blankness of the fog like faint ruled lines.

Peter fought the fog. It became, somehow, an insidious mental thing—a haze of doubts and semiverities. He questioned all reality. The world was a limitless thick confusion.

But now the sun thrust through the mist, and the color of California arose in swift shining triumph like a city from the sea.

The amazing color and glow of southern California! Peter marveled at it. He went about buying oranges by the bucket, with an odd, inexplicable excitement.

After a bit he remembered that he did not eat oranges, and became an object of considerable suspicion through attempting to give away oranges by the bucket.

He bought apricots by the lug, savoring the simple vigor of the phrase: "A lug of cots." It smacked of virility.

He bought a ranch, a small, unpretentious affair, which, in some sections of the country, would have been known as a house and kitchen garden.

He bought, and rather liked himself in a pair of blue overalls. He bought a hoe, because he knew, from reading poetry, that all horny-handed sons of toil had hoes.

The Western sun was bright and the Western sky was blue when Peter took possession of his little gray home. He had a sudden overwhelming conviction that all was right, which he did not stop to analyze, because he had come to the vague conclusion that analysis was somehow a corroding process.

Instead, he went into God's great outdoors to hoe. God's great outdoors was filled with hard hot sunshine because of the openness of the great open spaces.

But Peter knew that men who were men did not leave off hoeing because it was hot. He fell to hoeing with great vigor. He believed with all his heart that, now he had put himself in the proper attitude of mind and body, the West would begin.

He hoed on Monday, and nothing happened but old bottles and old iron.

He hoed on Tuesday, and nothing happened but great red spaces on his palms.

He hoed on Wednesday, and the West began. As his hoe made mighty flashes in the sun, and the old bottles flew, a young woman came to his fence.

Peter knew at once that she was sweet and simple, because she wore gingham. Her eyes were the clear singing blue of the southern California sky, and she wore the blueness of her dress as if it were a charming accident.

"You mustn't work too hard, you know," she murmured.

She was certainly a very sympathetic woman. She continued:

"I was wondering if I might offer you a glass of ice-cold milk and some hot home-made cookies."

She was certainly a very thoughtful woman. Peter all but tripped over his hoe in his eagerness for cold milk and hot cookies.

The lady had herself milked the cow and made the cookies. She was certainly a very capable woman.

Fancy Phyllis Sayre, in a scarlet sequin dress, milking a cow. Ha! No cow would stand for Phyllis's lack of sympathy. The cow would kick—and then Phyllis undoubtedly would kick the cow.

But Anne—Anne Brown—Anne Brown in a blue gown! They sat beneath a gay palm tree, the kind that goes straight up for rather a long dull time without anything untoward happening, and bursts all at once into a riot of green fan-shaped leaves, like sudden applause at the end of a tedious intermission.

"Reminds me rather compellingly of a bunch of greenery stuck in the wrong shaped vase," Peter said. "Er—charming, though. Very."

V

THE palm leaves were green, and Anne's eyes were blue. Far and away were the dim blue hills with the little white paths trickling down their sides like spilled milk.

It made a charming pastoral. Observe

Peter in his nice new overalls, and Anne in blue gingham, with the milk pitcher and the sugar cookies between them.

Tourists from Iowa poked heads out of passing cars, and looked for the moving picture machine, and went back to their hotels, and told their friends they had stumbled upon a scene of "Way Down East," being shot.

The cookies were very large and brown, with sugar on the top.

"Just simple homemade cookies," Anne said, with a simple homemade smile.

"Charming," Peter agreed, taking large virile bites. "The West has begun."

"Yes," Anne admitted, for all the world as if he and not she had begun it.

"You see, I've searched so long for it," Peter announced, waving a cookie.

"Yes?" Anne said.

"There is a certain frank simplicity," Peter declared, waving only a bite left.

"Yes!" Anne said.

"It's all rather wonderful, isn't it?" Peter remarked, waving his empty hand and reaching for another cookie, and waving it. "I mean to say—er—aren't the palms delightful? Er—do you feel it, too?"

"Oh, yes," Anne said.

Anne was a person of vast and sympathetic silences. Peter drank milk, and ate cookies, and told the story of his search for—for whatever it was—that nameless something.

Anne understood. She understood Peter better than any one ever had in all his whole life. Phyllis had never understood Peter.

The beautiful silences of Anne! Phyllis was full of clever quips that reminded Peter rather compellingly of the crack of the ringmaster's whip. There were tears in Anne's big blue eyes for the tortuous searchings of Peter the Misunderstood.

"Poor boy," she murmured. "Poor boy."

She laid her frank open hand on Peter's. Peter wanted dreadfully to take her in his arms and tell her—tell her—

The sun was sinking in the west. The sky was the color of oranges by the bucket, streaked with scarlet sequins.

Anne was a widow, and an orphan, and a ranch owner, and an old-fashioned girl. She could sew and cook. She sewed on the buttons Peter hoed off.

She could cook meals of ample propor-

tions for great strong men who were men, and needed sustenance, like Peter. She knew what would taste best when you came in from your hoeing.

Because her heart was warm and Western, she came into Peter's kitchen and cooked for him, for them. Peter, as he hoed, could see her through the open doorway in her fresh blue gingham, with her nice brown hands white with flour. She was rolling out dough for a pie crust.

Peter hoed and hoed. Anne had systematized his hoeing, correlated it, as it were, with the planting of some plants.

The sun was very hot. Quite suddenly, Peter found himself to be hoeing scarlet sequins. They were so bright he could not bear to look at them.

He shut his eyes, tottered a bit, and stepped awkwardly on his hoe. The handle flew up and struck him between the eyes. He sank down, down, down. Scarlet sequins crushed him, covered him, buried him—

Peter did not know how long he was buried beneath the sequins before the two women—if humans they were—came to dig him out. One was blue, and she wept a great deal:

"Poor boy! Poor boy!"

But her tears turned into sequins. The pile grew higher and higher. The weight of it was unbearable.

The other woman was scarlet, and she laughed softly.

"Darling dummy," said she, "to come clear out here to hit yourself over the head with a hoe."

She laughed softly and kicked at the great pile of sequins. They scattered, lightened. Peter could breathe again. But the blue woman came back and wept sequins.

"Stop it!" he shouted. "Stop it, I say. Stop, stop—"

His voice thundered like infinity; it cracked and broke like an eggshell.

VI

PETER groped his way back to reality slowly, like a stranger in a dark passage. Everything was quite black. Suddenly he knew why.

He was going blind. There was a thick bandage over his eyes. He put up his hand and felt it curiously.

"So I am blind," he said after a little. "Blind."

The words were cold and clear, like sudden frost.

Now, some one was speaking in a brisk professional voice. It was a doctor, of course. Men who were going blind always had doctors.

"Temporary blindness," the doctor said, reassuringly. "Brought on by sunstroke and a blow on the head."

"Temporary blindness?" Peter inquired. His voice shook a little. "Temporary blindness, doctor?"

"Certainly," the doctor replied. "Your ears are not affected, are they, my boy? Temporary, I said distinctly."

He shook Peter's hand encouragingly with his magnetic grip.

"That's good, doctor," Peter declared, weakly. "That's very, very good."

He thought for some moments with a curious intentness.

"Where am I?" he said finally, because the situation seemed to demand this of him.

"Sunset Sanatorium," the doctor answered. "Nice place."

"Nice name," Peter said conversationally. "'Sunset and evening star—' I stepped on my hoe, you know, doctor. Rather good, that. I came clear out West to hit myself over the head with a hoe."

The doctor accepted the hoe gravely, and departed. Peter settled back among his pillows, disliked them, twitched at them, found there were three, and threw two after the doctor.

The days in the sanatorium were long and indistinctive, and smelled collectively of disinfectant.

The nurse wrote on Peter's chart:

Patient restless and depressed. Inquires repeatedly if a lady has called.

When the doctor read this he frowned a little, and smiled a little, and went in and sat unprofessionally on Peter's bed. He put a thermometer into Peter's mouth.

"Hath a lady called, dothor?" Peter demanded, thickly, through the thermometer's opposition.

"Yes," the doctor answered, blandly. "As a matter of fact, two ladies. Anne and—er—Phyllis? Wives of yours, I believe."

"Wiveth!" Peter gasped.

The doctor feared for and removed the thermometer.

"What? Wives? What? What?"

Peter's voice was enormous. The little room seemed to rattle around it. A nervous patient in an adjoining room began to ring her bell violently.

"Tut!" the doctor said, reprovingly. "Glad to see that your lungs are strong; but this is not the time or the place for a try out. Wives, I said. Wives, they said. No one was to be admitted but your immediate family. Apparently, you have none but these two wives. One laughs. One weeps. Which will you have?"

"I will have neither," Peter asserted, controlling himself. "I will have no wife—none whatsoever."

"H-m," the doctor said. "Give me bachelorhood or give me death? A noble sentiment! Now, let me see what's to be done. Suppose I do not say temporary blindness, but actual blindness. Suppose I add to that, recent and complete financial ruin. It is possible that then you may be wifeless."

"Ah," Peter said. "Anne and—Phyllis? When did Phyllis get here? And why?"

"Blessed if I know," the doctor confessed. "You seem to have a way with the ladies. She read about you in the papers, of course. You've figured rather prominently of late. She doubtless felt that her place was at your side."

"She doesn't care a—a sequin for me," Peter said, fiercely. "She doesn't care a single sequin for me. You know that, doctor?"

"H-m," the doctor replied, reflectively. "That so? Well, in that case, when I perpetrate my little plot, you'll have one wife less. An advance in the right direction. After all, my boy, we're not in Utah."

"I have no wives," Peter repeated, dearly. "No wives at all."

VII

OUTSIDE, in the little reception room, the ladies waited. Anne endeavored to catch Phyllis's eye so that she could scorn her.

But Phyllis was deep in a magazine. She did not know she was being scorned. Anne found this trying.

When the doctor opened the door, the little room was sultry with scorn. He would have liked to withdraw, but he felt the situation tighten about him like a net.

"Oh, doctor," Anne said.

"Oh, doctor," Phyllis said.

"Oh, yes," the doctor said, uncomfortably, mopping his brow.

He studied the two faces. Then he turned and stared through the window at the gay green palm trees and the painted mountains. His expression was unreadable to the visitors.

"He'll need you," he remarked carefully, addressing no one in particular. "The fact of the matter is—I needn't tell how sorry I am—but he's going to be blind."

Blind! Around the word a small silence blew like a bubble.

"Renews your faith in the existence of an active personal devil, doesn't it?" the doctor went on. "You've seen the morning papers? Almost everything swept away. Everything, I might say—an unusually complete ruin."

The bubble grew to immense proportions. The doctor held his breath. Anne's voice shattered the silence.

"Poor boy," she murmured. "Of course, as you've guessed, doctor, I wasn't his wife. I was to be, or thought so, until this woman came along. I forgive him everything. I sorrow for him. This is his wife. Her place is at his side."

Phyllis regarded her steadily.

"I am not his wife," she said composedly. "It seems he was engaged to you. Your place is at his side. Don't let me keep you from it."

Anne wept a little.

"Poor boy," she sobbed. "I will not be a burden. I will not be a millstone. I will not be a—"

She struggled for a final metaphor. It eluded her.

"I will not," she finished, with something of an anticlimax.

"The reading of magazines is of notable service in enlarging one's vocabulary," Phyllis suggested, in a very little voice with a very high degree of audibility.

She closed the door after Anne, with a sharp slam.

"And that," Phyllis said, briskly, "is that. May I trouble you to call a minister? I'm going to take Peter for better. It can't be worse."

The doctor opened his mouth very wide. No sound came.

"Oh, doctor!" Phyllis exclaimed, reprovingly. "Close your mouth, do. Lend me your ears. I said: 'Call a minister.'"

The doctor found words.

"You heard me say blind?" he ques-

tioned. "There's just a chance. And the papers are full of the steel situation. He must not know."

Phyllis threw back her head. Her lips smiled.

"Do you think I'm going to read them to him? Read 'em and weep? Look at me. I can laugh—at a corpse."

VIII

PETER heard her laugh as she entered his room.

"Phyllis!" he begged. "You? Phyllis! Phyl!"

"The same," Phyllis answered, gayly. "In the flesh."

She sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Peter, my pet, prepare yourself. Put on your old gray bonnet. This is your wedding day."

"Ha!" Peter said, weakly. "You're joking, of course. Ha! Funny."

"No joke," Phyllis retorted, calmly. "Matrimony isn't, so I've heard. Have you any last requests?"

"Phyllis!" Peter exclaimed. "Oh, Phyl!" In spite of himself, his voice curled up like a question mark. "You don't love me?"

"As a matter of fact," Phyllis remarked, quoting deliberately, "I've been in love with you for a number of years—as, of course, you never knew. But it was against my better judgment. I did not, in the least, approve of you."

She leaned forward suddenly, and took Peter's hand.

"Peter," she said quite simply, "I've loved you so long, and so hard, and so far, and so wide. But I couldn't marry a blind man."

"Blind?" Peter begged. "Not—not blind, Phyl?"

"Yes," Phyllis explained. "Blind. You were blind—and now you see. You do see, don't you, Pete?"

She kissed him swiftly. Peter's eyes were bandaged, but his arms were still functioning.

"Phyllis," he breathed, after a reasonable interval, "I've been the most colossal idiot. But I understand you now, darling. You'll never be able to fool me again," he finished, triumphantly.

Phyllis slipped to her knees beside him.

"Think not, Pete?" she murmured.

She hid her face in the covers. Her shoulders shook—

Falls Friends

HERE WAS A HERO IN THE MAKING, BUT A GIRL ADDED SPICE
TO THE RECIPE, WITH A STARTLING RESULT

By Richard Howells Watkins

THERE are plenty of sights at Niagara besides the Falls, so Hector Phlasser and Bill Quilpin, standing in the zone of spray on the Canadian side, went quite unnoticed.

Hector, short, dark, meager of body and large of nose, stared at the Falls with an expression of inexorable gloom. Bill, built much more generously, both longitudinally and latitudinally, stared down at Hector with marked agitation.

"I won't let you do it!" Bill shouted, above the roar of the Falls, with determination in voice and gesture.

The smaller man turned a bitter eye up at his big friend.

"You won't!" he said, with withering contempt.

Bill Quilpin shifted his large feet uneasily, and shot an apprehensive glance from his diminutive companion to the thunderous waters.

"Aw, Hec, have a heart," he pleaded. "Think of how your girl would feel."

The insufferable glumness upon Hector Phlasser's face lightened a bit.

"That is precisely what I am doing," he said, and a species of grim satisfaction crept into his voice. Then the somber expression resumed its possession of his face. "Furthermore, if you expect me to remain your friend, do not address me at a moment like this as 'Hec.' I have warned you before."

"All right, Hector," Bill replied mildly. "But say, let's grab a train for home."

The short man barked derisively. "Come!" he said, and turned toward a building farther from the Falls.

He walked with quick, short steps, and Bill, endeavoring to conform to this pace, gave the impression with every shortened stride of his long legs that he was about to

bring up all standing, as if petrified by a brilliant idea.

Bill obediently trailed his friend into the little old structure beside the trolley tracks. Then, suddenly, he shied, and backed nervously toward the door.

"What's those?" he demanded, as a silent company of black-clad, white-faced forms suddenly appeared before him in single file.

"That's how they get down below the Falls," Hector replied, looking scornfully upward at the apprehensive Bill.

"They look as if they'd come from farther below than that," the big man muttered uneasily.

"I'm going down to study the situation before I make my plans," Hector said curtly. "Are you coming with me, or am I to go alone?"

"Oh, I'm coming," Bill answered with haste. He followed his long-faced, purposeful friend into a room where they were arrayed in similar long rubber coats and high boots.

Bill fidgeted unhappily as the elevator slowly lowered them down a black shaft, from the bottom of which came an oppressing subterranean roar.

"Sounds like hell on a busy day, don't it?" he commented without enthusiasm.

Beneath his cowl and black robe, Phlasser looked more cheerful than the other.

"I shall hear that sound far louder, very soon," he remarked with melancholy satisfaction. "Probably it will be the last sound I do hear on earth."

Bill Quilpin shuddered and stared apprehensively at his companion. "Aw, Hec—" he began, pleadingly; but Hector Phlasser erected a firm hand, like a policeman exorcising evil traffic.

"Enough!" he said sternly.

The elevator spewed them forth into a dimly lit, downward sloping cavern of black rock. To their ears came the eternal drip of water from the low roof, and the subdued gurgle of a tiny, ink-black stream at their feet.

"A cheery joint, this is," Bill muttered, disconsolately.

But Hector was moving downward with dark dignity, and Bill clumped after him in his heavy boots. Louder grew the roar. The yellow light of the cavern grew fainter. An impalpable grayness fought mysteriously against it.

Bill found himself shivering and perspiring at the same time, but he marched on loyally.

Suddenly Hector halted, and extended his sable-draped arm.

"Look!" he intoned hollowly in Bill's ear.

Bill looked. One side of the cavern had been cut away, and in place of the dark rocks was a living whiteness: a thick torrent of water falling with terrific speed and battering itself into atoms of mist on the jet, tortured rocks beneath.

An unhealthy, moisture-laden wind howled through this portal and tore foam from the fringes of the cataract. And, above all, arose a thunder that not even the thunder of heaven could rival. They were under the Falls.

Several other sable-robed figures stood immovably at this portal, gazing with fascinated eyes at the spectacle.

"Look!" bellowed Hector. "It is that which I shall defy—that which I will use to show her!"

He folded his arms and gazed defiantly into the heart of the cataract.

Bill Quilpin sagged from his right foot to his left; there seemed to be no words for either the Falls or the speech of his friend.

II

SUDDENLY a great gust of wind swept through the portal, bringing with it more than mist. The cataract seemed to bend, to thrust inward, as if to suck the little company into its clutches. Water beat heavily upon the spectators' rubber coats.

A scream rang in Bill's fearful ear, and then a small figure cast itself upon his chest. Bill fielded the terrified girl as neatly as if he had made a practice of doing that very sort of thing. His own anxiety was instantly dispelled.

"There, there!" he soothed, glaring angrily at the Falls. "Don't be afraid of a little douse of water. That's all it is—just a little hunk of water falling off a hill."

"I want to go up," the girl sobbed. "I don't like this place."

"Neither do I," Bill said, heartily. "Why should a person go underground before you have to?"

He tucked her trembling, rubber-covered arm under his, and turned her toward the elevator.

"Wait!" Hector shouted, angrily. "I have not finished my observations. The girl must go up alone."

Bill halted as if shot, and presented a harassed face to his friend.

"Aw, be reasonable, Hector," he remonstrated. "The lady is frightened. Let's go up and have some lunch. It's all on me."

"Go!" Hector said, darkly.

A drop of perspiration fell from Bill's forehead and joined Niagara's flow. He glanced from the girl to the man, in dire perplexity.

"I—I—can't go right now," he confessed, lamely, to the frightened girl. "Do—do you mind waiting here just a minute, with me? We'll stand way back in the passage where we can't see the Falls at all."

The girl slowly, but firmly, began to withdraw her arm from Bill's protecting grasp. Swift, feminine curiosity supplanted terror in the glance which she shot from beneath her eyelashes at the queerly assorted pair. In sudden decision she ceased to pull her arm away, and silently stood back.

"That's the stuff!" Bill applauded, vastly relieved. "Hate to be impolite to a lady, but—well—my name's William Quilpin, and that's Hector Phlasser, my partner. We keep a garage down in Darien, Connecticut. I put in the money and the beef, and Hec—Hector, I mean, supplies the education and the brains. Been here long?"

He paused hopefully, and lowered his head to listen.

"I am Elsie Robinson," the girl replied, without hesitation, for Niagara breeds contempt of conventions. "I came here to-day on the boat from Cleveland, on my vacation. I work in an office there, and I've always wanted to see the Falls."

"All alone?" Bill inquired.

The girl nodded, without embarrassment.

"The girl I was coming with unexpectedly had her vacation postponed. I had my room engaged at a boarding house, and, besides, I had counted so on this experience, so I came by myself."

Hector was still gazing challengingly at the cataract, and although Bill's ears had been devoted entirely to this conversation, his solicitous eyes had not left his friend's figure once. The girl had noted this, and had taken advantage of the fact to survey her big rescuer's countenance thoughtfully. She was in process of framing a further remark when Hector turned.

"Enough!" he said. "We will ascend."

His eyes dwelt with some hostility upon the girl. She met his gaze frankly, although her face conveyed nothing of her reaction to his inspection. They moved toward the elevator.

But they were not to go up together, after all. The car was nearly full when they reached it. Bill skillfully handed the girl in, and, with a big shoulder, convinced a man in front that there was more room in the cage. Before Hector could step aboard, the door was closed in his face.

The elevator moved upward.

"Your friend isn't with us," the girl said.

Bill gave a stricken exclamation.

"He isn't afraid to be left down there alone, is he?" she asked.

"No," Bill admitted, uneasily. "It's me that's afraid of his being there all by himself."

"But why?"

Bill hesitated. The light was feeble in the elevator, and all he had seen of her face was a mere oval paleness. As for the rest, that was all hidden beneath the rubber coat.

She might have pink eyes, green hair, and feet bigger than his own, for all he could discern. He decided to reserve confidences until they reached a better light. At least she had a pleasant voice.

"Long story," he said, and the elevator bore them away from the subterranean roar without further conversation.

At the top they emerged and paused, looking at each other.

"Thank you for—for being so kind," she said evenly. "It was silly of me, of course, but the Falls are—rather tremendous, aren't they?"

Slowly she drew off the black sou'wester, and he saw her face.

"They are," Bill said swiftly, and eagerly as well. The face, like the voice, was decidedly pleasant, and without the least hint of the coquettish. "Make you feel like a bug in a hurricane, don't they?"

"Good-by," the girl replied firmly. "I hope your friend will come up all right."

Bill glanced anxiously at the elevator, which was slowly filling with new venturers. Lowering his voice, he said urgently:

"Look here, Miss Robinson; I'm in trouble. I need help—advice—a little brainwork. Won't you come to lunch with us and sort of ease things up for me?"

"Why did you let him prevent you from taking me up?" the girl asked quickly. "Is that part of—the trouble?"

"It is," Bill answered emphatically, and his eyes left the elevator a moment to look at her interested countenance.

"Here's the scenario: Hec's a friend of mine. He had hard luck in business, so, needing brains in the garage, I gave him an interest. Well, about a week ago he and his girl had a row—and it kept on. He's a sensitive little cuss, and broody, and maybe a bit jumpy at times. But he and I always get along all right. I sort of humor him."

"I saw that," Miss Robinson remarked.

"But women are different, somehow—some of 'em," Mr. Quilpin explained.

"In the argument his girl wouldn't give in, and finally she told him—sort of figuratively, you know—to run away and jump off the Brooklyn Bridge, or go over Niagara Falls in a barrel, if he wanted excitement—that she was tired of furnishing it for him by holding up her end of a scrap."

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed, and there was a world of comprehension in her voice.

"Well, Hec quit talking, then, and come down and sat in the garage office, not saying a word—just brooding. I got nervous and nervous, and at last I got him to tell me about it. And then he says he's catching a train to Niagara, where he met the girl, and he's going to do just what she told him to do—go over the Falls in a barrel."

"Well, why not?"

Bill looked at her in open-mouthed astonishment, if not dismay.

"Why—why—Hec's a pal of mine," he pointed out slowly. "I'm not letting him do any such thing. But he's such a de-

terminated little cuss, I don't rightly know how to stop him. Of course, I let the garage go to hell—excuse me, Miss Robinson, I mean I left with him, and I been within six feet of him ever since, till now. I'm scared he's going to try it without a barrel, maybe."

"And you want my help in stopping him?" the girl murmured, and again her voice was thoughtful.

"That's it," Bill replied eagerly. "How about it?"

The girl's period of cogitation was not long. "I'm here on a vacation, and I have nothing else to do," she reflected aloud. "If you'll let me pay for my own lunch, I'll go with you two, and perhaps help."

"Atta girl!" Bill Quilpin applauded, and clasped her hand fervently.

III

THE girl swiftly extricated herself from his hearty handshake, and departed to rid herself of her cumbersome garb, leaving Bill staring with mounting anxiety at the elevator door.

When the car reached the top on the next trip, Hector Phlasser strode out with more than his usual celerity. He halted and glared when he saw Bill.

"So this is the way you desert me when the first pretty face comes along!" he accused. "Such callousness on the part of one I call a friend nearly moved me to—desperate measures."

"Now, Hector!" Bill pleaded. "I swear it wasn't my fault that guy slammed the door on you."

"Perhaps not," Hector said, bitterly. "You certainly didn't even know he was doing it. Ah, well, I can't expect anything else, I suppose. We will lunch."

"She—she's coming with us, Hector," Bill announced, diffidently.

"What!" Phlasser ejaculated. A world of hurt was in his voice. "At a time like this you philander with a girl!"

"She's—she's sort of interested in you," Bill said, with a sudden flash of duplicity. "Asked me who you were, and all about you."

"Did you tell her—my story?" Hector demanded.

Bill did more than hesitate; he went over the situation in his own mind, and looked down at the smaller man's intent face before replying. Something, certainly not pleasure, but perhaps leniency, expressed

in Hector's countenance, decided him to tell the truth.

"Well, yes," he admitted. "She was so—so eager to hear about you that I kind of told her the whole thing."

"Huh!" Hector said, enigmatically. "I thought you promised not to reveal my plans?"

"I only promised not to tell Helen," Bill defended himself.

"Well, it's done, now," Hector remarked, and his voice had resumed its despondency. "We might as well get out of these rubber things."

They dressed in silence. Bill, afflicted with doubts concerning the cleanness of his collar, turned to consult his friend, and found Hector craning his neck to inspect his own in the mirror. Bill did not put his question.

It was a very different creature from the small, black shrouded figure with the half seen oval face that they met outside the dressing rooms. Miss Elsie Robinson had emerged from her dark cocoon, a charming blond butterfly in gay blue sports attire and a saucy little tight-fitting felt hat. Bill gasped at the sight of his charming fellow conspirator, and Hector straightened his small figure abruptly.

Bill introduced them with painstaking correctness, and Hector bowed punctiliously in acknowledgment.

"An unexpected pleasure upon the occasion of a rather melancholy business," Hector said, with dismal gallantry. "Bill, since you do not know this part of the country, perhaps I had better pick out the restaurant."

"Go as far as you want," the relieved Bill replied.

Hector led the way to one of the comfortable restaurants in the park, and selected seats for the others overlooking the Falls.

"I understand from Bill, here, that you are aware of my intention?" he inquired, as they awaited the sizable lunch he had ordered.

The girl nodded.

"I was amazed when he told me," she said. "How can you think of such a thing?"

"There are times when life is less important than other matters," he replied heavily.

"When do you go over?" she asked naïvely, leaning forward with her elbows

on the table. Her manner was flatteringly attentive.

Bill caught his breath and stared at her. She spoke as if a trip over Niagara Falls in a barrel were much in the same category as a trip abroad in a liner. He noted that Hector, too, was looking at her rather blankly.

"I must make my plans first," Phlasser explained. "There must be no hitch. In the actual launching, Bill will be of help."

"Me?" Bill asked faintly. "Aw, Hector, have a—"

"Have you decided which Falls?" the girl asked. "It says in the guidebook"—she produced a small booklet—"that the American Falls are nine feet higher than the Horseshoe Falls. The Horseshoe Falls are only one hundred and fifty-eight feet."

"It will probably be the American Falls, then," Hector said, bleakly. "I expect to spend several days in careful study, as I have already explained, in order to make sure that, once launched in my barrel, I will drift surely through the upper rapids to the brink of the Falls."

Elsie Robinson nodded thoughtfully.

"It would be too bad to make all those plans and then just drift ashore," she agreed. Her attention was still partly on the guidebook.

"Maybe the American Falls would be better," she went on. "It says here that in nineteen-twenty an English barber met death when he attempted to shoot the Horseshoe Falls in a barrel of his own design. They found bits of the barrel."

Bill Quilpin emitted an honest groan of dismay.

"Nobody's ever tried to go over the American Falls, apparently," Elsie said brightly. "It might be much easier—who knows?"

Hector did not reply at once. Finally, however, he said in a tone of rebuke: "I am here not to select the safest Falls, Miss Robinson, but the surest."

"They both look quite sure to me," the girl said, in no way abashed. "And is Bill going to fish you out at the bottom of the Falls—if he can find the barrel—or are you going on through the lower rapids and the whirlpool? They're quite dangerous, too."

Bill Quilpin sat rigid in his chair, his emotions equally divided between delight that she had called him Bill, and horror at

the coolness with which she discussed Hector's hazardous feat.

"I shall probably go through everything," Hector decided, with gloomy pride.

"How wonderful!" the girl exclaimed. "Doesn't it take a lot of bravery?"

"Some," Hector admitted.

"I—I wonder—" the girl said, and then her voice died hesitantly away.

"What?" Hector asked, pressingly.

"Well, I—was thinking—if you'd let me take some snapshots of you getting into the barrel, and then I'd take a few more of the barrel going over the Falls. They would make such a wonderful souvenir to show when I got back to the office in Cleveland."

"It will be a pleasure," Hector assured her.

"It's so kind of you," the girl murmured.

Hector gently patted her hand, which happened to be lying on the table.

"Not at all; not at all," he assured her.

IV

BILL moved uneasily and looked away. He had an unsoothing feeling that his conspiracy was not going well. He reckoned the girl's success in dissuading his partner as distinctly negligible, so far.

The afternoon passed pleasantly, except for Bill. As soon as his partner had paid their checks, and the girl her own, Hector suggested that they combine observation and education. He assumed the position of guide, and took them on a lecture trip around the gorge and the whirlpool.

It was not until they ended up on Goat Island that Bill was able to get a word with the girl in private. Hector, standing high on a rock, surveyed with inscrutable eyes the torrent that rushed with ever quickening pace to the dreadful brink.

"Say, what's the idea?" Bill demanded, under cover of the roaring water.

"Isn't he just marvelous?" the girl replied, so low that Bill could hardly hear her. Her blue eyes, slightly dilated, fairly feasted upon the brooding, motionless figure on the pedestal of rock.

"Listen!" Bill said, in some exasperation. "He has enough reasons for going over the Falls without your asking him to let you take pictures of it. I thought you were going to help me stop him?"

She turned her eyes to him for just an instant.

"Surely you know that a woman may

change her mind," she chided him gently. "Besides, the pictures might be valuable."

Bill reeled slightly; then sat down on a rock and mopped his forehead. Such mercenary motives as this were hard to believe in a girl whose face was so beautiful, and so sympathetic that he had trusted her on sight. In attempting to share his troubles, he had doubled them.

It became increasingly apparent to Bill, next day, that he had erred grievously in confiding in Elsie Robinson. Disconsolately he trailed along behind his determined friend and the pretty, eager admirer, as they wandered about Niagara Falls, seeking a cooper or carpenter who could be intrusted with the task of building a stout barrel.

Bill came along to make sure that the barrel would be at least as strong as human hands could devise. He distrusted Hector's engineering knowledge, for Hector always kept away from the mechanical details of the garage business at home, and stuck to the books.

The task was not an easy one, for at several places they visited their inquiry for an unusually strong barrel was met by startled eyes and a swift refusal. However, Elsie's quick eyes finally discerned a little shop, which, despite its diminutive size, boasted its ability to do anything at all in the wood line from cabinetwork to cordwood.

"A barrel!" the proprietor repeated. He was a red-haired, purple-nosed gentleman, whose sign proclaimed him Gerald Bluker. "And what would you be putting in it?"

"It's just for a joke," the girl explained fluently. "We're going to take it back home with us and tell our friends that Mr. Phlasser went over the Falls in it."

"Ha!" Mr. Bluker exclaimed, abruptly. Bill shied nervously, and the keen eye of the carpenter dwelt upon him speculatively. "That kind of a barrel, eh? Well, now, it happens I have just the thing, all built. And cheap—the demand's that poor. Look here!"

He led the way through a narrow passage to the back of the shop, pulled aside several boxes, and disclosed a huge barrel.

"Oak," Mr. Bluker announced, tapping its staves. "Steel bands around it. Double construction. Padded inside. Weighted a bit at the bottom, so it floats with this triple-locked slide up. Water tight. Easy

to get into and out of without assistance. You could go over the Falls in that, and sleep like a baby all the while."

"Who'd you build it for?" Bill demanded, with some hostility. Undoubtedly the barrel was a good job—a discouragingly good job.

"The poor lad!" Mr. Bluker muttered, reminiscently. "All set to go, he was, but he hung around, looking at the Falls and getting wet every day, and pneumonia got him."

He wagged a sorrowful head.

"We're here to-day and gone to-morrow," he added, heavily.

Hector inspected the slide carefully.

"What do you think of it, Bill?" he inquired.

"How're you going to build anything that will stand Niagara?" Bill asked in return.

"Bobby Leach's barrel was not half as strong," Mr. Bluker said stoutly.

"Yeah, but his luck was about two hundred times better'n Hector's, I'm betting," Bill retorted.

"I'd take it—Hector," Elsie Robinson said suddenly. "Finding it seems a splendid piece of luck, to me."

She gazed at him, expectantly.

"There's just one condition I'd make, gentlemen," Mr. Bluker put in. "The police do not take kindly to—barrels going over the Falls. I'll deliver it anywhere you say, but I'm not anxious to have it known where it come from."

"The police?" Hector inquired. Bill looked at Mr. Bluker with new interest.

"Certainly," Mr. Bluker replied. "You don't s'pose they encourage that sort of thing, do you? It gives the Falls a bad name."

"I'll take it," Hector said, decisively.

"I knew you would," Elsie breathed, softly.

Bill resorted to perspiration to express his emotion.

"Pay him, Bill," Hector commanded. "I'm a little short—I came away too quickly. If you don't"—he eyed his protesting partner sharply—"I can easily wire for it, and I'm not the man to forgive a slight like that."

"Of course he'll pay for it," the girl said, sending a glance that was somewhat indignant at Bill. "I'm sure he wouldn't let a pal down that way."

Bill paid, and, after Hector had instruct-

ed Mr. Bluker to hold the barrel until he received word where to deliver it, they left.

"Well, I'm glad that's off my mind," Hector declared, almost cheerfully, as they found themselves walking back toward the Falls. "Nothing to do now but go over, and let Helen see how sadly she underestimated me.

"You know," he added, in a tone that was lower and once more pensive, "that girl was incapable of comprehending me. She—"

Elsie turned a sympathetic ear toward him, but Bill broke in rudely:

"How much longer do you reckon you'll need to study the Falls before you try it?"

Hector hesitated longer than such a question really required before he said, sharply:

"Now that I must make certain that the police do not interfere, it will probably be several days, at least. You're worrying about the garage, I suppose."

"No, I wasn't," Bill said, slowly. "But it's a good garage, if we haven't been making much lately, and I hate to think our customers are getting bum service."

"Bill's a bit on the tight side, Elsie," Hector confided to the girl. "Suppose you and I leave him to-night and take dinner somewhere by ourselves. That 'll save him a dollar or two. I want to tell you about how Helen misunderstands me."

"That would be rather nice," Elsie murmured.

Bill halted, red to the ears.

"I'm not crashing in where I'm not wanted," he announced.

"See you later, then, at the hotel," Hector said promptly. "Come on, Elsie; let's go eat."

The girl accepted his arm, and they walked on. Bill helplessly watched them go. Just once, Elsie turned her head and looked back at him, but Bill was too far away to see her expression.

V

THAT night Bill slept but poorly. Just before midnight he heard Hector come into the adjoining room, but it was several hours after that before he finally got to sleep.

The tinkling of the telephone awakened him. He jumped up. The thin, gray light of a cloudy dawn filled his eyes. He plodded sleepily to the telephone.

"Bill!" said the voice at the other end of the wire.

"Hector!" Bill exclaimed. "What's the matter? Where are you?"

"Just wanted to say good-by, Bill," Hector's deep voice answered. "I'm pushing off now—over the Horseshoe Falls. I was afraid you'd try to stop me or tell the police, old man, so I had to plan secretly. Look for me below the rapids and whirlpool, Bill; I'm going through everything—right down to Lewiston."

"Great guns! Hey, wait! Hec!" Bill gasped, but he spoke into a telephone that had gone dead.

Dropping the receiver, Bill dived for the connecting door. Hector's bed was empty; the telephone call had been no dream.

A horrible picture of the barrel dancing through the upper rapids, pausing an instant on the brink, then hurtling downward into the veil of mist that concealed the bottom of the cataract, flickered through his brain like a veritable moving picture.

He rushed toward his clothes. Somehow he scrambled into them, but he knew all the time he was too late—that there was no hope of racing with the Niagara River.

At a dead run, he shot through the empty streets toward Prospect Point. The Falls, roaring louder in the stillness of morning, spread before him, inscrutable, dreadful.

He strained his eyes at the river above and below them for the barrel—for wreckage, but he saw nothing but angry water. His eye swept down the river to the upper bridge; then on, as far as he could see.

Nothing! It must be out of sight in the lower rapids already.

Near the entrance he encountered Elsie Robinson, hurrying breathlessly toward the Point. Bill's accusing eyes fell upon a camera tucked under her arm.

"I—I thought you'd be here!" she panted. "He telephoned me, too. Do you—"

"Come!" he said sternly. "We've got to get down to Lewiston fast—an automobile 'll do it."

He found a taxi, and pulled the protesting driver from his seat.

"I'm driving; you're showing me the road," Bill said curtly. "Let's go."

They shot away through the sleeping town, with the driver beside Bill, shouting directions, while Elsie sat tensely in the rear seat, clutching her camera. Bill, his

big body hunched over the wheel, traveled full throttle on the straightaways, and crowded the car to the mathematical limit on the turns.

The miles between the Falls and Lewiston slipped by in a roar of exploding gasoline. But fast though they sped, Bill knew he was racing a mad, plunging river.

The little town at the end of the rapids popped suddenly into view.

"Come on!" Bill commanded, as he thrust some bills at the driver. "We'll have to hoof it back up the river, along the trolley tracks. Watch both sides. If he's gone by here alive, he's safe. But—"

Elsie said nothing. They hastened up the rails that run beside the river. They met no one.

The Niagara here is not a rapids; it is calming after its wild race through gorge and whirlpool. It surges swiftly between its rocky banks, but its most tumultuous course is over.

"He's probably busted into a million pieces," Bill muttered, bitterly. "Poor Hec! The game little cuss! You shouldn't have egged him on."

"I'm sure he's safe," Elsie asserted. "A good deal safer than we were in that car, anyway."

"Huh!" Bill said, scornfully. "Poor Hec! Come on!"

He broke into a dogtrot. The girl loped along beside him, at an easy stride. Occasionally one or the other stumbled, for their eyes were on the river.

"There!" the girl exclaimed, halting abruptly. She pointed ahead.

Bill gave a shout. In a little backwater on their side of the river, hemmed in by bowlders, a barrel was gently bobbing. A slide in its planking was open.

As Bill shouted again, and sprinted forward, the head and shoulders of Hector Phlasser appeared above a great rock. He waved his hand jauntily.

"Hec! Hec!" Bill roared. "You came through! Attaboy, Hec! Gosh!"

He wrung his partner's hand, pounded him on the back, and whooped again. Then he sat down, completely winded.

Hector was dripping wet, but his smile was brilliant as he confronted the girl.

"Yes, I came through, all right," he said. "I told you I would, Elsie. It was just—terrible, but when I got down the river this far I could tell it was all over, at last. So I opened the slide, waited for

a good chance, slipped overboard, and towed the barrel ashore."

"I'm so glad!" Elsie cried, still breathing quickly. "But"—her voice took on a reproachful note—"you promised me you would let me take pictures of you."

"Darn the pic—" Bill began, but Hector interrupted.

"Pictures?" He waved his hand at the barrel and himself. "Go as far as you like!"

"I wanted *action* pictures," the girl said. Her voice trembled. "Anybody could get a picture of you like this, but—but I wanted one showing you in the barrel. Couldn't you get in now?"

"Nothing doing," Hector declared firmly. "I'm through with that barrel. Well, how about some breakfast, now? It's on you, Bill."

"Sure," Bill agreed happily.

"I want a picture," the girl insisted, rebelliously. Her lower lip was quivering. "Bill, isn't the barrel s-s-seaworthy?"

The symptoms of tears worried Bill. He glanced at her solicitously, and then obediently descended to the river's edge to examine the barrel.

There were marks of hard usage on its oaken staves, but it was still as strong as ever. He peered into the opening, felt of the padding, and finally rocked it back and forth as it floated in the tiny eddy.

"I couldn't let you take pictures of the start, Elsie," Hector explained soothingly. "I was afraid you'd weaken, and get the police to stop me. That time I left you, just after we ditched Bill, I telephoned Bluker to get the barrel across to the Canadian shore and leave it in the woods above the upper rapids. This morning I called you both up just before I started. That was as soon as I dared let you know."

VI

"I THINK it's mean—" the girl began. Bill, straightening up suddenly, took the camera from her hands, looked at it, and silently gave it back to her.

"Be a sport, Hector," he urged. "Hop in, and I'll shove you off, and Elsie can get her picture. There's no danger here—we saw the kids in swimming around here the other day. You can swim ashore again—you're wet already."

"I tell you I won't!" Hector flamed. "Give me a cigarette—I'm all tired out." Bill stared at him. "Do you mean to

say you won't do that much to oblige a lady?" he asked, incredulously.

"I won't!" Hector shouted. "Damn it, I won't! What's got into you, Bill?"

He bristled up to the larger man, his brows contracted in an ominous scowl, but his mild partner did not back down.

With a growl, Bill reached for the angry little man. His big hands gripped Hector under the armpits. Then, with slight exertion, he lifted him up and lowered him into the barrel that moved gently to and fro in the backwater.

Hector, mouthing profanity, started to stand up, but the instant he raised himself the barrel reeled to one side and threatened to roll completely over. He sank back instantly, clinging to the sides.

"Bill—"

"Off you go," Bill said briskly, gripped the end of the barrel, and pushed it out into the swift stream. The currents of the river seized it instantly.

"Now let's see you get out without rolling her over and wetting that padding!" Bill shouted.

Hector, sitting motionless, turned starting eyes at the waters swirling around him, cutting him off from the receding shore.

"Save me!" he screamed suddenly.

"Bill, I can't swim! I didn't do it! I framed it! Save me!"

"That's all I wanted to know," Bill muttered. He dived awkwardly into the river, and swam strongly after the barrel. With a half dozen vigorous pushes he sent it ahead of him to shore.

Clambering up on the rocks, he lifted out the shivering Hector, placed him on a ledge, and stood towering over him.

"So you tried to gyp us!" he accused, grimly. "Tried to gyp your girl, and Elsie, and me, and the whole world. I'm wondering if the rotten season we been having in the garage hasn't something to do with gyping, too. I'll find out when I go home."

"I—" Hector began, but a growl from Bill silenced him, and he lay flat on the rock.

Slowly the anger died out of Bill's countenance as he looked down at his quivering partner. Perplexity took its place.

"Your talk's as big as Niagara, but your nerve and decency are no bigger'n the puddle you're lying in," he muttered. "I'm trying to figger how you ever got to bluff me into thinking you were a pal—a friend

of mine I could trust on the books or anywhere else."

He paused, and anger again swept over his face.

"Beat it, or I'll step on you, you little squip!" he rumbled.

Hector scrambled instantly to his feet. There was no mistaking the danger note in his partner's voice. He climbed nimbly up the bank, and fled down the track to safety.

Bill looked at the girl, who had witnessed all this without speaking a word or making a move to open her camera. The perplexity that had been upon his face returned, but it was a different perplexity—a hopeful perplexity.

"Elsie," he said, "you been acting pretty low down to me, but I don't believe it. You gyped me, but I don't believe it, either. What's up?"

Elsie laughed softly. "I was afraid you were going to chase me down the track, too."

"No," Bill said, reflectively. "I'm not that dumb. I get things sometimes, after I do some thinking. You wanting me to look at that barrel and put Hector back in it, for instance. I knew that—after I saw dry padding in the barrel, and no film in your camera."

"I hope now there's no film on your eyes," Elsie said. "Why, Bill, you're so honest you'd trust anybody, and so sympathetic you'd probably have given that wretched little bluffer half your garage to console him and prevent him from going over the Falls, if I hadn't come along. Couldn't you see he didn't mean to do it?"

"No," Bill admitted, slowly. "He was a friend of mine, a partner, you see; so when he tells me he's going to do something, I *had* to believe him, until he showed himself up."

"Well, pick your partner better next time," Elsie counseled, with a laugh. "Now run along back to your hotel and put on some dry clothes before you catch your death of cold."

Bill showed no disposition to obey.

"I've got my partner picked," he said with a happy smile.

"Oh, you have, have you?" the girl replied, challengingly.

"Haven't I, Elsie?" he asked, humbly.

"Certainly not," the girl retorted, but the indignation in her voice was not in the least convincing.

The Gamble-Horse of Dead Angel Mountain

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—HERE IS AN EPIC OF HEROISM, WITH
NO SMALL PROPORTION OF HUMOR, CONCERNING THE
WELL-KNOWN DESERT METROPOLIS OF RED BLUFF
AND ITS TWO INIMITABLE FOUNDERS

By Earl Wayland Bowman

"This is the tale of a pack horse—
And a burro, lonesome and sad;
But even those days, by various ways,
A burro could go to the bad!"

Songs of the Thirsty Three

IT was dusk. Twilight shadows crept across the distant Tombstone Range. A vagrant evening breeze fitfully fanned the sultry air, its gentle breath a gesture of relief from the heat and glare of a day in late July.

Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith sat on the steps of Mother Skillern's two-story frame hotel. Occasionally they gazed at the borax mine, east of the gulch, which they themselves had discovered, owned, and drew royalties from.

The mine, also, was entirely responsible for the existence of the two hundred and seven population, one Chinese laundry, and seven saloons in the metropolis of Red Bluff, out in the imperishable desert that dominates, with unspeakable aridity, the southwestern extremity of the State of Nevada.

"It's gettin' darker!" Dirty Shirt murmured idly.

Solemn Johnson knew it, and did not answer. His gray eyes were turned toward the fading bulk of Dead Angel Mountain, on the edge of Hellfire Basin, far to the northeast.

As he looked, an expression of melancholy settled over Solemn's face, and he slowly, thoughtfully, continued to chew his tobacco.

Finally, Solemn spoke.

"Somehow I sort of dread it!" he mut-

tered, a note of despondency in his voice.

"'Tis gettin' darker, ain't it?"

"Dread what?" Dirty Shirt asked, looking around.

"That trip we're startin' on, out to Dead Angel Mountain, to-morrow," Solemn answered. "Wonder if my eyes is failin'?"

Dirty Shirt plucked nervously at his red whiskers.

"Have you got a—a—'persentiment'?" he asked, uneasily.

Solemn carefully measured his words before replying.

"I don't know th' 'sickology' of it—" he began.

"P-sy—chology," Dirty Shirt corrected.

Resentment flashed from Solemn's eyes.

"I wisht to Gawd you'd never got that dictionary!" he retorted, impatiently. "Ever since that damned book agent sold it to you, you've been tryin' to teach me to pronounce words that I pronounced successful before he was ever born."

"Well, p-sy-'s right—" Dirty Shirt started to argue.

"P-sy—p-sick—or p-sock—" Solemn broke in fretfully. "Th' 'ology' of it ain't vital. All I know is I just got a kind of squeamish feelin' inside of me when I think of it."

For half an hour there was silence.

The shadows deepened. The lights from Red Bluff's seven saloons streamed from windows and doors, and threw inviting splashes of illumination into the dusty street.

Like a giant, newly minted coin, the full moon pushed itself above the eastern rim

of the desert, seemed to pause, then leap upward into a perfect yellow disk, as bright and shining as hammered Mexican gold.

Without comment, Solemn and Dirty Shirt watched the splendid birth of another gorgeous, romantic night. From the top of Slaughter House Butte, across Rattlesnake Cañon, the shrill yelp of a coyote suddenly pierced the brooding stillness.

"Sounds like Joshua," Solemn mumbled gloomily.

Dirty Shirt looked in astonishment at Solemn. He knew, and he knew Solemn knew, that it was Joshua—Red Bluff's three-legged, half-domesticated coyote that had given tongue to the clear, high "C," soprano-like notes.

"Not only sounds like Joshua," Dirty Shirt answered, a tone of petty annoyance in his voice, "but it is Joshua. As many times as you've heard that coyote yelp, it looks like you'd recognize him without unnecessary remarks."

"Well, it did sound like him!"

"Tis him, I told you!" Dirty Shirt retorted sharply.

Solemn sighed, and was silent.

A moment later the sonorous, beseeching bray of a burro unexpectedly shattered the calm serenity that had settled over the scene.

"Sounds like Versus," Solemn said, looking up the street.

Dirty Shirt viciously bit off a chew of tobacco.

"It not only sounds like Versus," he snapped, "but it is Versus. Any darned fool ought to know our own mouse-colored burro's bray. She's up at Saloon Number Seven, nickerin' for Tom to give her a bucket of beer—"

"Tom ain't on duty to-night at Number Seven," Solemn broke in. "Ed's on duty."

"Well, then—nickerin' for Ed to give her a bucket of beer!"

There was another pause.

Solemn broke it.

"Seems to me her voice was hoarse," he observed, gently.

"Most burros' voices is hoarse," Dirty Shirt flung back. "Versus ain't no exception to th' rule."

"Reckon she's gettin' kind of old," Solemn said, absently. "Must be awful to have to tell everything just by sound."

"Well, of all things!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed. "Who ever heard of a burro gettin' old?"

"Burros get old—same as everything," Solemn replied, sadly.

"Versus has been packin' our stuff around over this hell-blisterin' old desert for twenty-five years," Dirty Shirt sneered, "and as far as I can see, she ain't gettin' any older than she ever was."

"Versus is gettin' old," Solemn repeated, "and"—as a sudden whimsical thought possessed his mind—"she's entitled to a vacation."

Dirty Shirt laughed derisively.

"Versus is entitled to a vacation," Solemn went on doggedly. "She's gettin' old, an' she needs some diversion. When we go on this trip to-morrow, she's goin' to stay right here in Red Bluff an' live a life of luxury, instead of packin' our danged outfit wearily across th' blazin' heat of th' desert! She's goin' to stay right here an' escape th' blindin' glare—"

"That's got to be figured out," Dirty Shirt interrupted. "Just remember, Versus is half mine."

"It 'll be figured," Solemn answered, laconically.

The musical jingle of freight bells interrupted the argument; the rattle of wagons, nearing Red Bluff, on the Barstow Road, could be heard. Above the lighter tinkle of the smaller bells, there sounded the heavier, deeper-toned clang of a cowbell. For a moment Solemn and Dirty Shirt listened.

"Sounds like Tom Shannon's outfit," Solemn observed, "all exceptin' that cowbell ringin'."

"It not only sounds like Tom Shannon's outfit," Dirty Shirt retorted, pettishly, "but it also is! An' you're experienced enough, you ought to know it."

II

As Dirty Shirt finished speaking, an eight-horse, two-wagon freight outfit swung up out of Rattlesnake Cañon and headed along Red Bluff's single one-sided street toward Heterogeneous Saunders's livery stable, at the farther end of the thoroughfare. Solemn and Dirty Shirt watched the heavy, leg-weary team shuffle slowly past the porch of Mother Skillern's two-story frame hotel.

A white horse, not prepossessing in appearance, was tied to the rear end of the trail wagon; from a strap about the horse's neck a cowbell hung.

"His wagons rattle empty," Dirty Shirt observed.

Solemn did not reply.

His thoughts were on the white horse, stumbling along in the dust. From the looks of the animal, Solemn knew it was not such as Tom Shannon would use in a heavy freighting outfit.

"I said," Dirty Shirt repeated, "that Tom's wagons rattled empty—like he didn't have much of a load of back freight."

Still Solemn musingly sat and scratched his chin.

"Well, I hope he brung them two barrels of Bourbon, Ed said he ordered for Saloon Number Seven. They're mighty nigh out up there," Dirty Shirt continued.

Even this brought no response from Solemn.

"Well, of all things!" Dirty Shirt snorted. "Can't you get up no interest in nothin' to-night?"

"I'm thinkin'."

"Well, just because you get a spell of thinkin' on you," Dirty Shirt grumbled, "ain't no reason why you can't pay attention to what people are sayin' when they're tryin' to talk."

Solemn arose slowly from the steps.

"Versus is goin' to have a vacation," he muttered.

"Ain't you over that sentiment yet?" Dirty Shirt snapped, also rising.

"I ain't. She's goin' to have it."

"The idea!" Dirty Shirt sneered. "Th' dog-gone fool idea of a burro—a dog-gone burro—needin' a vacation! It ain't feasible. Besides, Versus don't need no vacation. She's been vacatin' ever since I've been acquainted with her; and in th' second place, it's just as beneficial for Versus to get out in the desert, away from Red Bluff, occasionally, and unabsorb some of th' beer she's been absorbin' as it is for us to get out once in awhile an' unsoak th' whisky we've been a soakin'."

"An' ultimately," Dirty Shirt went on, "there ain't another pack burro in Red Bluff, an' if Versus don't pack our outfit, who in Sam Hill is goin' to pack it?"

"Providence provides," Solemn answered quietly as they stepped into Saloon Number Four.

A moment later, Tom Shannon, as a prelude to supper in Wong Gee's Café, next door, also entered the fourth oasis.

"See you brung an' extra horse, Tom," Solemn observed, carelessly. "Where'd you pick him up?"

"Tain't him; it's her," Tom answered,

good-naturedly. "I met Bob Reavis on the Pimento-Barstow cut-off; Bob had her, an' I shot craps with him for her an' won her, so I brung her along. Bob got her from Lafe Sawyers, over in Sodamint Cañon. They played seven-up for her, and Bob had to take her; Lafe got her from some gypsies that brung her from beyond Dead Angel Mountain—he drawed straws for her.

"She's a gamble-horse," Tom finished, with a laugh. "Th' gypsies told Lafe she was."

"A what?"

"A gamble-horse. It's bad luck to get rid of her, except by takin' a chance an' gamblin' for her."

"What's her specialty?" Solemn asked.

"Seems to be a ex-pack horse," Tom replied. "You want to own her?"

Dirty Shirt suddenly sensed danger.

His shouted "No!" and Solemn's "Yes!" came at the same instant.

Tom chuckled.

"We'll flip a nickel for her," he said to Solemn, taking a five cent piece from his pocket and shaking it between his cupped palms.

"All right!" Solemn laughed. "How much have I got to put up against her?"

"Nothin'!" Tom grinned. "If you call it, she's yours, an' if I call it, I lose. I'll take tails!"

"Ain't nothin' left for me, then, I reckon, but heads!" Solemn laughed back.

He knew that Tom carried—for amusement, rather than profit—a nickel with a buffalo on each side of it.

Tom flipped the coin on the bar.

"Heads it is!" he exclaimed. "She's yours!"

"I had a feelin' I was goin' to win that horse," Solemn murmured.

"I had a feelin' you was, too!" Tom replied, slyly.

Dirty Shirt had watched the performance with disgust.

"Now, I reckon—" he began, glaring at Solemn.

"Now, I reckon," Solemn interrupted, grinning, and laying a bill on the bar, "it's customary for the winner to set 'em up!"

"'Tis customary," Tom replied, as the crowd lined up, "and maybe one more won't hurt me, but it 'll probably mean a double shot of ham an' eggs. One makes an appetite, two puts a razor edge on it, an' three kills it!"

"I reckon—" Dirty Shirt tried again.

"I reckon," Solemn broke in once more, "that Versus's vacation is provided for."

"With that old white horse?" Dirty Shirt snarled.

"With she!"

Dirty Shirt suddenly switched his mode of attack.

"Well, of all things!" he sneered. "Who ever heard of a darned old, yaller whiskered idiot winnin' a horse sight unseen? Without even knowin' her name! Th' chances are she ain't as much as got one." He sent a baleful glare at Tom.

"Dirty Shirt!" Colonel Spilkins—foremost citizen of the metropolis of Red Bluff—exclaimed reprovingly. "I'm surprised at—"

"So'm I!" Dirty Shirt ejaculated.

"I'm surprised," Colonel Spilkins went on, in mock reproach, "that you'd insinuate Tom is so unsquare that he'd take advantage of Solemn an' gamble a horse off on him that didn't even have a name. What is her name, anyhow, Tom?"

"Justice!"

"What!" Dirty Shirt exploded. "Th' impudence of namin' a danged old white horse Justice!"

Colonel Spilkins himself was rather taken by surprise, and Solemn Johnson began to experience an uneasy feeling.

"It's suitable," Tom replied, soberly.

"Her name's Justice," he repeated.

"Suitable!" Dirty Shirt snapped back.

"What's suitable about namin' a horse, an' 'specially a pack horse, an' a white horse, an' maybe a sway-back horse, Justice?"

Tom winked at Chuck Roden, the bartender, started toward the door, and laconically answered:

"She's blind!"

Solemn flinched, but was game.

"Well, I won her," he muttered, "an', by gosh, I'll keep her—temporarily, anyhow, that is."

"Reckon th' bell goes with her?" he called after Tom.

"Sure!" Tom laughed.

"'Sure—th' bell goes with her!'" Dirty Shirt mimicked. "In addition to her other disagreeable features, she's probably hard to catch, an' she has to wear a bell, so you can tell where she's at."

"You're wrong, Dirty Shirt," Tom flung back with a laugh, pausing at the door. "She has to wear th' bell so she can hear it ringin' an' know where she's at herself!"

The crowd roared.

Solemn looked gloating at Dirty Shirt. Dirty Shirt flushed.

"Now," Solemn chortled, "I reckon it's somebody else's time to set 'em up!"

Dirty Shirt laid a bill on the bar.

III

SOME hours thereafter, having successfully negotiated a complete circuit of all seven of Red Bluff's invitations to inebriation, and having impartially distributed their patronage thereamong, Solemn and Dirty Shirt wended their way—at least, with commendable persistence—toward their cozy shack, nestling snugly against the sand ridge in the rear of Saloon Number Four.

Rounding the southeast corner of Wong Gee's Café, they unexpectedly discovered Versus, their patient, mouse-colored burro, quietly chewing a chunk of bacon rind which she had, no doubt, retrieved only a moment before from the garbage can beside the back door of the restaurant.

The moon had long since passed the zenith of its orbit, and was now well on its way down the western slope of its arc, and nearing the horizon. A serene calm, broken only at times by the low call of some night bird, or the faint sweet chirp of a late-prowling horned toad, rested like a benediction upon the two hundred and seven population, including Solemn, Dirty Shirt, but not Versus—metropolis of Red Bluff and the expansive, imperishable desert adjacent.

Stirred deeply by his emotions, Solemn stepped quickly forward and flung one arm affectionately over Versus's shaggy, grizzled neck.

Dirty Shirt barely noticed Versus. In mute, enthralled adoration, his brown eyes were turned upward toward the silvery moon which hung like a pendent pearl, in the silent sky above him.

For a moment the tableau endured.

"Poor little Versus," Solemn murmured. "She's gettin' old, an' she's entitled to a vacation."

"An' Solemn Johnson never squashed a centipede," he added, glancing at Dirty Shirt, "if she ain't goin' to get it, in spite of all the red-whiskered, darned old sand-shufflers here or hereafter!"

Dirty Shirt appeared not to hear.

"She's goin' to have her vacation—" Solemn began again.

"She's nervous, ain'sh she?" Dirty Shirt broke in, his eyes still gazing upward toward the moon.

"That's one reason," Solemn replied, without looking around, "why she's entitled to a vacation."

It dawned on Dirty Shirt, then, that Solemn was speaking of Versus, while he, Dirty Shirt, was absorbed in a more poetic theme.

"Well, for gosh shake!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed. "You—shill on thash—vashakin'—su'ject? I didn't mean'sh—her," jerking his head toward Versus. "I mean'sh—her!"

He pointed again to the moon. "She's goin'—round'sh an' round'sh—thash way, ain'sh—she?" He swung his hand from left to right.

Solemn despised intemperance, as did also Dirty Shirt—ordinarily.

"It's time you was in bed!" Solemn grunted, disgustedly, removing his arm from Versus's neck, and starting toward their cabin. Dirty Shirt followed, mumbling argumentatively.

"Well, she—ish—movin'. Strangesh p-shy-k'logishk 'shenomenish I—I—ever—shaw!"

A little later, Solemn and Dirty Shirt entered their tiny shack. Versus, looking wistfully after them, stood in the soft, caressing moonlight, and silently chewed her bacon rind.

The sun was well up, and Red Bluff astir, with the daily grind of business on its way, when Dirty Shirt Smith, as in a dream—for he was still asleep—seemed to hear the slow, measured clanging of a cowbell. The illusion, if illusion it was, drew nearer.

It came up to the side of the shack, stopped for an instant, and then, as Justice—Solemn Johnson's acquisition of the night before, and which he had only that moment led over from the livery stable—vigorously shook her head, the metallic clamor volleyed forth with the startling suddenness of the first movement in a well organized charivari in South Missouri.

Dirty Shirt sat up suddenly.

"What in Sam Blazes!" he yelled.

Solemn Johnson stepped into the room.

"Get up!" Solemn ordered. "While you're gettin' breakfast, I'll be gettin' the outfit together, an' as soon as we've et we'll load Justice up an' start!"

Dirty Shirt swung his feet off the bed, and glanced down, a bewildered, half ashamed expression in his brown eyes.

"Now, who in hell?" he demanded. "Who left my shoes an' pants on last night?"

Solemn's lips curled contemptuously.

"Get up!" he repeated, sternly. "An' get breakfast while I fix Justice."

"My Gawd!" Dirty Shirt broke in angrily. "You ain't serious about takin' that darned old blind ghost, instead of Versus, be you?"

"I be. Get up, I said!"

Dirty Shirt climbed out of bed and stood unsteadily for a moment, trying to get his bearings and assemble some sort of argument—which he knew in advance would be fruitless—to dissuade Solemn from this sudden and absurd idea. Dirty Shirt could see no reason at all for using a strange, unknown, blind, white pack horse for their contemplated trip, instead of their own mouse-colored, and faithful, even if at times erratic, Versus.

"Get breakfast!" Solemn ordered once more.

Dirty Shirt's head ached. He decided to await a more favorable opportunity, when his mental faculties had been cleared by a few cups of coffee, before attempting to convince Solemn that his scheme for a vacation for Versus was unfeasible.

Not until breakfast was finished, and Solemn was putting the pack on Justice, was anything more said of the matter. Versus stood near, curiously watching Solemn settle the packsaddle on the blind, white horse's back. Dirty Shirt leaned against the door, glaring.

"Hand me them blankets!" Solemn snapped, nodding his head toward a roll of bedding by the side of the shack.

Dirty Shirt made no move to obey.

Instead, he flared up, deciding it was time to strike.

"Look here!" he snapped back at Solemn. "This damn thing's gone far enough, an'—"

Solemn cut him off.

"She's goin' a danged sight farther. Hand 'em!"

Dirty Shirt obeyed, grumbling:

"Of all th' idiotic, dog-gone, fool, dad-gummed, double-cussed, unbelievable freaks of th' imagination, this idea of usin' that old 'antiquicated' congregation of hide an' bones to pack our outfit on, instead of

Versus, that's been doin' it steady for twenty-five years an' knows how, is th' worst I ever read about!"

"Justice ain't so 'antiquicated,'" Solemn flung back, "but what she's capable, an', as far as I can see, willin' to be a darned suitable pack horse."

"She's blind!"

"Tain't her fault."

"She's sway-backed!"

"Tain't her fault. Anyhow, it makes th' saddle fit better."

"She'll fall down an' bust everything. I wouldn't trust my fiddle on her!"

"Pack your damn fiddle yourself, then!" Solemn barked.

Dirty Shirt felt that he had slipped, and paused for a moment.

"Somebody 'll have to lead her!" he growled.

"Somebody's goin' to lead her."

"Twon't be me," Dirty Shirt broke in. "I'll shoot her first!"

Solemn turned his gray eyes full on Dirty Shirt.

"You just try shootin' her once!" he challenged, coldly.

"Furthermore," he went on, a note of finality in his voice, "we're partners. We split on royalties from the borax mine; we've split in th' past, an' we'll split in th' future—an' we'll split on leadin' Justice. I'll lead her my half, you'll lead her your half, an' that settles it danged solid!"

It was a grim, inexorable pronouncement. And Dirty Shirt knew it.

"Oh, hell!" he grunted. "Maybe I won't exactly shoot her, but—" Even yet he felt that he could not entirely yield—"danged if I wouldn't like to!"

With the pack fixed firmly on Justice's back, Solemn picked up the lead rope and started down the slope toward Rattlesnake Cañon, up which they would journey to Arsenic Springs, thence north by northeast across the open, blinding, heat-swept desert to Dead Angel Mountain.

"I'll lead her to-day," Solemn announced. "To-morrow, you can lead her."

Dirty Shirt smothered an oath and swung sullenly into stride beside Solemn.

IV

VERSUS watched them go, her long ears thrust forward, her big brown eyes filled with surprise and wonder, as if she tried to figure out by what right this strange blind white pack horse was packing the

pack which she felt had come to be almost a part of herself. A hurt look came into her eyes.

She was being cruelly left behind. She gazed after Solemn and Dirty Shirt and Justice.

They rounded the corner of Saloon Number Four, and turned into the wide, one-sided street of Red Bluff. With sudden determination, Versus shuffled along on the trail of the trio.

At the dip into Rattlesnake Cañon, Solemn glanced around and saw Versus following them. He stopped and waited until she came near, then gently tried to shoo her back.

"Go on home, Versus," Solemn commanded softly. "You're havin' a vacation now. All you got to do, this time, is stay in Red Bluff, an' drink beer, an' chew gunny sacks an' bacon rinds, to your heart's content."

Dirty Shirt snorted contemptuously.

Versus, wide eyed, stood and looked seriously at Solemn.

"Go on home, Versus!" Dirty Shirt mimicked. "'Go on home!' Papa Solemn an' Uncle Dirty Shirt's got another 'ittle, tootsy-wootsy, damned old blind bell-ringin' playmate!"

Solemn flushed a dull red.

"If you wasn't already so danged old," he snapped wickedly at Dirty Shirt, "I'd kill you for them damned remarks."

Dirty Shirt chuckled in sardonic glee. Solemn turned and again started forward. Versus followed.

Once more Solemn stopped.

He had to admit that he was puzzled.

"She don't want no vacation," Dirty Shirt laughed, looking at Versus. "It 'd break her darned heart if she didn't go along like she's always done."

"Maybe there's something in that," Solemn conceded. "So she can go along—if she wants to—but she's still on a vacation, just th' same!"

Dirty Shirt suddenly had an inspiration.

"Did it ever occur to you," he said, facing Solemn, "that a pack horse has got to have more feed than a pack burro has? That miserable old blind white imitation of a four-footed Swiss bell ringer will starve to death out on Dead Angel Mountain, while Versus, bein' a burro, would thrive an' stay fat an' rosy-cheeked an' joyful on cactus, Joshua bark, an' occasionally a plate of beans or two."

Solemn instantly matched Dirty Shirt's argument.

"You stay here," he said, handing the lead rope to Dirty Shirt, "an' hold Justice. I'll take Versus back to the livery stable, borrow a packsaddle, and get a sack or two of oats for her to stroll along under if she's bound to go with us. That way she can be on her vacation, an' take some extra rations along for Justice, too."

Dirty Shirt groaned, and surrendered.

A half hour later, Solemn, leading Justice, and Dirty Shirt trudging grudgingly beside him, and Versus contentedly swinging along under a burden of a hundred and fifty pounds of oats for Justice to eat, disappeared up the winding and tortuous gorge of Rattlesnake Cañon.

Night came. The quartet camped at Arsenic Springs.

Dawn came. The quartet moved onward, braving the flaming heat of the desert.

There came another night and another day, and at twilight Solemn and Dirty Shirt, Justice and Versus, reached their destination and were camped well up on the slope of Dead Angel Mountain, at the higher edge of a little mesa which Solemn and Dirty Shirt, on a previous visit, because they had seen one of the little animals there, had named Ground Hog Flat.

The camp was pitched where a tiny spring seeped bravely from the foot of the more abrupt mountainside. A pair of Joshua trees found life possible there from the moisture supplied by the spring, and some willows, a few bunches of greasewood, and, at the uppermost margin of the damp area, one lone yucca added to the oasislike charm of the place.

On the flat below the camp scattering tufts of salt grass struggled desperately to clothe, with a harsh and wiry covering, the nakedness of the greasy-brown, alkali-impregnated adobe on which it grew. To the south, a quarter of a mile away, was a deep, sheltered, sandy-sided gorge in which some dozen gnarled and twisted piñons valiantly fought for life.

This gorge, Solemn and Dirty Shirt had explored before. It was here that Dirty Shirt acquired his famous racing horned toad, Edith. For this reason, Solemn and Dirty Shirt had christened the little cañon Horn Toad Holler.

A mile north of the camp, its forbidding depths filled with black, hogback basalt

dike, and curious, ill-shapen boulders of other volcanic rock; its sides covered with crumbling, outcropping ledges of shale and treacherous chalky formations, was Hydrophobia Gulch. It was a place of horror, mystery, and death, a weird and yawning abyss, a ghastly gash extending from near the summit of Dead Angel Mountain down to its spreading mouth, from which spewed the slow waste of the centuries into Hellfire Basin.

Staked out on Ground Hog Flat, Justice browsed contentedly on the scant but nutritious tufts of grass which—although sightless and guided only by the feel of the rope with which she was tethered—she occasionally found.

Justice felt, intuitively, that in Solemn Johnson she had found a friend. And even in the profane and vociferous Dirty Shirt Smith she detected a subtle, oath-concealed bond of sympathy which a less sensitive consciousness would not, perhaps, have discovered.

And, although Dirty Shirt frequently cursed her, sneered at her, and made fun of her, the dried prunes which he surreptitiously and frequently fed to her, without Solemn Johnson's knowledge, strengthened Justice's belief that he was not wholly her enemy.

Versus appreciated her vacation. She lounged indolently about the camp, gnawing at will on the bark of the Joshua trees, nosing among the cooking utensils for chunks of bacon rind, or, if the whim possessed her, standing for hours beside the mild and gentle-mannered Justice.

At first Versus was jealous of Justice, but she soon overcame such a narrow and petty emotion. She saw life from a broader viewpoint, and felt that it was the right of Solemn and Dirty Shirt to have other interests; that she had no right to monopolize their entire attentions.

Ere long the noble, unselfish little burro acquired a sincere fondness for the blind white pack horse, the bell she wore, and the partly edible strap with which the bell was fastened to Justice's neck.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt relaxed completely now.

V

THE splendid calm and the soothing solitude of Dead Angel Mountain refreshed Solemn and Dirty Shirt's Red Bluff-weary souls.

Their days were spent in digging a location shaft, six by four feet long and wide, and to be ultimately ten feet deep. It was not that they had any expectations of a possible mineral discovery, but merely because it was a good place—a dozen or so rods from camp—to “experiment,” as Solemn said.

They dug intermittently, and while they dug they quarreled cheerfully and consistently about Justice. Dirty Shirt's antipathy for the white blind pack horse, which really proved to be a sturdy and well-dispositioned animal, seemed to increase as the days went by.

At night, Solemn and Dirty Shirt, having finished their supper, would lie by the smoldering embers of the camp fire, chew tobacco, argue and counterargue about Justice until the clang of the bell she wore lulled them to sleep.

So passed two such idyllic weeks.

Then came the morning when it was Solemn's day to work down in the location hole, the same being now all of eight feet in depth. Solemn, having eased himself down by holding to Dirty Shirt's hands while the latter leaned over the side of the shaft and supported him, called back to Dirty Shirt:

“Drop that canteen of water down. After which, while I'm drillin' for this next shot, you'd better go over to Horn Toad Holler and see if you can't find a piñon pole long enough to make a lug for me to climb out on.”

“All right,” Dirty Shirt acquiesced. “I kind of wanted to go over there, anyhow, an' see if I could run across any of Edith's relations.”

As Dirty Shirt turned away, Solemn shouted:

“Be sure Justice is staked good an' safe before you leave. I don't want her strayin' around loose while I'm down in this hole.”

Unwittingly, Solemn had put the germ of a hellish idea in Dirty Shirt's mind. As Solemn's request came to his ears, a sudden fiendish light came into Dirty Shirt's eyes, and a cruel grin parted his lips.

“Don't worry,” he replied, carelessly. “Justice 'll probably keep her balance till I get back.”

“Well, be sure her stake's drove in solid!” Solemn yelled.

Dirty Shirt stalked away and made no answer.

For half an hour Solemn pounded indifferently on the steel drill, resting frequently in the shade of the perpendicular wall of the narrow, gravelike hole. At such times Solemn would listen to the far-away sound of Justice's bell, and smile contentedly to himself.

It was during one of these rest periods that it suddenly appeared to Solemn that the sound of the cowbell was becoming clearer. At first he thought it was the wind carrying the tones toward him.

He listened intently. The bell would ring a few measured times, as if Justice was walking. Then it would stop for a moment of silence. Again would come a half dozen regular, rhythmic strokes of the bell.

This was repeated until Solemn was convinced that Justice was groping her way, unrestrained, through the eternal darkness in which she dwelt. And she undoubtedly was coming toward the shaft!

“My gosh!” Solemn muttered. “That danged horse *is* loose—an' headed this way!”

Solemn stood rigid, peered upward, held his breath, and listened, and again he could hear the cowbell drawing nearer, still nearer, to the prospect hole.

Solemn's first emotion was anger.

“That blamed, old, red-whiskered, contrary idiot has gone off an' left Justice loose!” he growled savagely. “An' no tellin' where she'll go or what she'll do!”

But Solemn's rage quickly changed to fear. Even as he spoke he had a conviction that Justice, in her pitiful blindness, would wander up to the shaft and fall in. Such a contingency would be a tragedy of the most unpleasant sort.

Solemn well knew that in a hole four feet wide, six feet long, and eight feet deep, there wasn't room enough for both himself and Justice. He shuddered as he thought of what would happen should Justice, weighing approximately nine hundred pounds, fall into the shaft and, of course, on top of him.

And Solemn was by now convinced that Justice would do exactly that thing. There flashed to his mind a picture of himself smashed, flattened, and wedged tightly in the bottom of the location hole, under Justice's body.

He wondered how Dirty Shirt would get him out. The gruesome thought came to him that Dirty Shirt, to save labor, prob-

ably would just fill up the shaft with Solemn and Justice in it, and thus casually bury them both. Perspiration oozed profusely from every pore of Solemn's body.

"My Gawd, she *is* a gettin' nearer!" he cried out, almost in panic, as the cowbell rang with such vigor that it was evident that it could be no more than a few yards from the shaft.

Solemn cursed himself for sending Dirty Shirt away at a time like this.

"If th' darned old horned toad packin' fool would only hurry back!" he almost prayed.

Indeed, if a fervent, desperate desire to be out of a narrow hole eight feet deep—into which a blind white pack horse with a bell on is about to fall—be prayer, then Solemn prayed, and prayed with all the emotional earnestness of which his soul was possessed.

It occurred to him that perhaps Dirty Shirt had already returned, stopped at the camp, and not noticed that Justice was loose. Solemn raised himself up, cupped his hands, and shouted his partner's name.

No answer came. A moment of dead silence followed. Then there was the sudden jangling of the cowbell, as if Justice had violently shaken her head.

Solemn heard it, and trembled. It brought a new terror to his rapidly tightening nerves.

"I gotta keep quiet," he muttered in alarm. "If Justice hears me, an' Dirty Shirt don't, she's liable to try to come to the sound of my voice.

"An', my Gawd!" he gasped. "If she does come, it 'll be awful!"

The bell moved forward. It sounded now as if it were at the very edge of the shaft.

Solemn could imagine poor, sightless Justice pausing, her foot lifted, ready to take the fatal step that would cause her to plunge down upon him. The vision held such agonizing possibilities that he cried out sharply:

"Back up, Justice! Back up, you danged old fool!"

The bell shook. A little stream of gravel and earth cascaded down the side of the shaft.

A terrifying thought flashed into Solemn's mind. It might be Justice's hind feet that had dislodged the sand and gravel!

If so, and she obeyed his advice to

"back up," Justice would literally sit down on him from a height of eight feet, and all would be ended. Solemn hastened to reverse his command.

"No! No! Get up— I mean! Get up, Justice!" he yelled frantically. "Get up! Go on! Shoo! You darned idiot!"

The bell clanged, as if Justice had taken a step or two and stopped. A moment of silence ensued.

Then Solemn heard the bell slowly tolling. Justice seemed to be walking away. Again it stopped. A little later it started again.

As near as he could judge, Justice was moving around the slope of the hill. Solemn heaved a sigh of relief. It was short-lived, however.

The bell stopped. Once more it jangled. And again it began to approach the shaft from the other side. Justice had, apparently, made a half circle, and was coming back.

Like the measured strokes of doom, the bell drew nearer.

The suspense was agony. Solemn felt his morale going. He flicked the sweat from his eyes; his hands trembled.

"My Gawd!" he groaned. "I do wisht that darned Dirty Shirt would re-turn!"

The bell continued to approach, haltingly, yet surely. Relentlessly it advanced. It now was again almost on the edge of the shaft.

Solemn could look up and see the oblong fragment of brassy, overheated sky, and nothing more.

The bell paused, clanged, paused, and clanged again.

"Hey! Justice! Whoa! Wait a minute! Shoo!" he shouted. "For Gawd's sake, watch out what you're doin'!"

The bell stopped.

There was a long wait. Solemn crouched in the bottom of the shaft, looking fearfully upward. The bell suddenly jangled viciously, and he answered with a startled:

"Whoop! Oh, Gawd—"

VI

AND Dirty Shirt Smith, lying on the ground a few yards from the location hole, the bell tied on to the end of the lug extended before him, swallowed his tobacco quid in the effort to suppress an explosion of raucous, unholy laughter.

For half an hour the torture continued. Then the bell seemed to turn and go slow-

ly, pausing—advancing—hesitating—moving onward, as a blind horse would, until once more Solemn, listening breathlessly, almost exhausted from the agony of doubt, heard it faintly, regularly, and rhythmically from a distance.

It was now as if Justice had returned again to Ground Hog Flat, and was standing contentedly, half asleep, in the hot forenoon sun.

A little later, Dirty Shirt Smith, the lug over his shoulder, strolled up to the edge of the shaft and peered down at Solemn.

"Got that hole drilled?" he queried innocently.

"Drop that danged pole down here an' let me out!" Solemn demanded feelingly.

Dirty Shirt slid the pole down.

"Must be kind of warm down there," he remarked. "You look like you been sweatin' a good deal."

"Shut up an' hold that damn pole steady till I get out!"

When Solemn stood on the firm ground, out under the welcome glare of the sun, his gray eyes gratefully swept the wide, empty desert. He heaved a sigh of relief, and looked toward Ground Hog Flat, where he could see Justice standing quietly, apparently safely tethered.

Solemn turned a searching look on Dirty Shirt. His partner gazed back without the flicker of an eyelash.

"That horse staked?" Solemn snapped.

"Why, I reckon—" Dirty Shirt replied, as if surprised at the question. "She was staked when I went away this mornin', an' she seems to be now."

"Why was you inquiren'?" he finished, almost too naively.

"Well, she was up here awhile ago," Solemn replied, viciously, "an' dog-gone near fell in on top of me!"

"Well, of all things!" Dirty Shirt ejaculated. "Ain't that queer? So she was up here?"

"She was! An' if she'd took another step she'd have come pilin' right down on me. Once she danged near slid in an' was hangin' half over the edge before I could make her back up and go away!"

"Ain't that funny—"

"No, it ain't funny, nor never was funny!" Solemn broke in. "If you think it was, or is funny, just get down in a hole as little as that one is, and have a cussed, old, blind, white pack horse with a bell on about to fall in on top of you yourself!"

Dirty Shirt chewed his fresh quid of tobacco rapidly, finding it also suddenly expedient to turn aside his head to expectorate, but not from politeness.

"I meant," he replied, when he had recovered control of his facial muscles, "ain't it funny Justice was staked when I departed this mornin', was staked when I returned, an', as far as I can see, she is still staked at present? An', in spite of that, you think she was up here episodin' around, riskin' her liberty an' her old white neck tryin' to fall in that shaft while you was flinchin' an' squirmin' in agony down in the bottom of it!"

Solemn looked suspiciously at Dirty Shirt.

His partner's brown eyes lighted suddenly, as at a thought.

"I bet I know how it was!" he exclaimed. "I bet you was sort of warm, an' got drowsy, an' went to sleep an' just dreamed Justice was hoverin' over you!"

"That's the p-sy-chology of it," he added, triumphantly. "You just had a kind of 'Oregon boy' nightmare in th' daytime—a sort of echo of that book by Homer Davenport that Mother Skillern lent us to read when we was out to Hellbroth Oasis th' last trip."

The victim flushed as he remembered the source of Dirty Shirt's inspiration, and which Solemn himself had forgotten. His gray eyes squinted wickedly.

"Some folks has got too damned effective memories," he snarled, angrily, turning toward the camp. "An', as far as I'm concerned, you an' Justice, an' her danged bell, an' the whole works can go to hell. I'm goin' back to Red Bluff to-morrow mornin'. An' that's th' 'sickology of that!"

"Justice was your idea—"

"Shut up, an' don't mention ideas to me again!"

Dirty Shirt chuckled inwardly. He felt that out of seeming defeat he had achieved a notable victory.

For a few steps there was silence.

"Well," Dirty Shirt observed, finally, "if we're goin' back to Red Bluff in th' mornin', how about them samples of that ledge that crops out up in Hydrophobia Gulch and looks like asbestos, we was goin' to get? We ain't got them yet."

"You can get 'em this afternoon," Solemn interrupted. "You can pack your pick an' shovel an' things on Justice, and

make the trip over there an' back before supper time!"

"I'll take Versus."

"You won't take Versus. You'll take Justice. Versus's vacation is still in progress at this writin'."

"Anyhow," Solemn went on, "I may want to take a nap while you're gone, an' I don't want that infernal bell janglin' an' wakin' me up!"

Dirty Shirt agreed to take Justice.

After lunch, leading the blind white pack horse, a water canvas swung from the packsaddle, the cowbell clanging cheerfully, Dirty Shirt trudged away toward the long, sloping spur of Dead Angel Mountain, behind which was Hydrophobia Gulch. As he trudged, he snickered.

Occasionally, without stopping, he took a dried prune from his pocket, removed the seed, and, reaching back, put the meat of the fruit between Justice's thick, sun-burned lips.

Solemn watched Justice and Dirty Shirt until he could no longer hear the sound of the bell.

"I hope they both break their damned old skinny necks!" he muttered, heaving a sigh of relief. He was glad to be alone with Versus—the calm, serene, inscrutable, unemotional one.

Somehow, Solemn felt that he never wanted to hear the ring of Justice's bell again. He felt that he had had an overdose of cowbell, and he would never forget how terrible a cowbell can sound, under certain awful conditions.

"As quick as I get back to Red Bluff," Solemn told himself, "somebody's goin' to win a blind, white, dog-goned old pack gamble-horse if there's any way on creation's earth to make 'em!"

"Providin'," he added, bitterly, "I don't shoot both her an' Dirty Shirt Smith first! I'll get even for that danged fool joke with th' cowbell, anyway, or break a leg tryin'."

After which, with Versus standing guard, Solemn stretched himself on a blanket, beneath one of the Joshua trees, and went to sleep.

VII

It was dusk when Solemn awoke.

He opened his eyes suddenly, as if he had been called, but by whom and from whence he could not tell. Solemn's first consciousness was of exquisite, sublime, intoxicating silence.

This was quickly followed by a strange, unaccountable feeling of dread. The silence became an ominous threat.

For a moment, Solemn lay still. The events of the day marshaled themselves in his mind.

He sat up and looked around, expecting to see the familiar, angular figure of Dirty Shirt Smith bending over the camp fire, warming up the beans for supper, or perchance, sitting beside the friendly blaze. But there was no fire, nor was there any Dirty Shirt Smith.

And where Justice should have stood, like a dingy white splotch on Ground Hog Flat, there was only the unbroken grayness of the deepening twilight. Even Versus, standing pensively beside the place where the supper fire ought to have been, was motionless as a statue of blue-brown granite, and made no sound.

Solemn arose thoughtfully, kindled a fire, and mechanically began preparing the evening meal. Versus came near and watched, silently, each of Solemn's movements. It seemed as if she, too, was depressed—filled with queer, unspeakable gloom.

Solemn listened at intervals for the sound of Justice's bell. The desert gave back no near or distant jangle.

Methodically, Solemn went to the ground cache, where he and Dirty Shirt kept their grub, scraped the sand from the box, lifted the lid, took out a bacon rind and gave it to Versus. She accepted the tidbit, yet with a certain somber restraint. Solemn smiled wistfully as Versus chewed the morsel.

"She knows which side of her bacon rind th' grease is on," he muttered whimsically. "Don't she? She do!"

One by one, as by a magic hand, the stars were lighted, until the heavens were aglow with myriad twinkling jewels.

That weird, translucent sheen which a starlit, moonless sky sheds upon the desert, and only upon the desert, and which is neither darkness nor light, nor dusk nor dawn, nor of any earthly quality, settled on Dead Angel Mountain, Ground Hog Flat, and the more distant Hellfire Basin.

It enveloped all like an eternal verity that should forever reveal and yet conceal, forever invite and yet repulse, forever intrigue and yet resist the eyes of man.

And Solemn Johnson knew that night had come.

He felt suddenly old, and worn, and alone.

It came to him as a shock, that he and Dirty Shirt were both well into the seventies—past the allotted three score and ten—and age must be, and was surely, creeping upon them.

An avalanche of memories flooded Solemn's mind. Like flaming meteors, flashing across a midnight sky, there swept before his vision a review of the forty-odd years during which he and Dirty Shirt had wandered together from place to place.

Solemn recalled, in quick succession, their hardships, the dangers, the hopes and disappointments, the failures and successes, the diversions, the quarrels. These last named sometimes had been profane and seemingly vicious, but understood always, by both men, to be for entertainment purposes only.

He visualized the heat, the thirst, the hunger, the poverty and, since they found the borax mine, the riches that he and Dirty Shirt had shared and shared alike. Solemn smiled as he thought of how they had discovered the borax mine.

It seemed he could see, again, Versus standing beside the little clump of greasewood in the red dawn, chewing on Dirty Shirt's other sock; Dirty Shirt's chagrin as he sat up on his blankets and saw what Versus was doing; the look of amazement on Dirty Shirt's face as he glanced at the rock he had hurriedly picked up to hurl at Versus's head, and discovered that it was a chunk of pure borax from the great ledge which, a few hours later, Solemn and Dirty Shirt located and exposed to the needs and uses of civilization.

A thrill of pride cheered Solemn when he thought of the borax mine. It was the one great triumph of his and Dirty Shirt's lives.

Because of it, the two hundred and seven population, one Chinese laundry, and seven saloon metropolis of Red Bluff had sprung up, and prosperity had come to many. It had made the wheels of industry revolve in the midst of the vast, imperishable desert.

In his soul Solemn Johnson was altruistic. He rejoiced more in the happiness it made possible for others, than he did in the immense wealth which the borax mine had brought to himself and Dirty Shirt.

He gave but a passing thought to the half million dollars which he and Dirty

Shirt had received in royalties from the thousands of tons of borax the mine had produced, and was still producing. Practically all of the money reposed to his and Dirty Shirt's credit in Los Angeles banks.

The mania of big spending, when big money came to them, had not lured Solemn Johnson or Dirty Shirt Smith to the places where men imagine that, by flinging a golden shower of coins, they can cause the illusive flowers of happiness to spring up and bloom unfadingly along their hectic path. These old prospectors had measured the *absolute* of nature with the *perhaps* of human pretense, and they knew that the high priced pleasures of the latter were only effervescent bubbles.

And, as they had lived before wealth, Solemn and Dirty Shirt had lived after wealth. They were proud, yet humble worshipers at the shrine of the great truths and realities of creation.

Solemn was not morbid now, yet his heart was heavy.

As he thought of Dirty Shirt and blind, white Justice somewhere—and God only knew where—out in the impenetrable silence and darkness of the night, when they should have been back to camp hours before, a sigh of utter loneliness involuntarily escaped from his lips.

"I do wisht to Gawd they'd get back!" he muttered.

The sound of his own voice startled him from his pensive reverie. Squatting down by the fire, he slowly dished out a plate of beans.

"Reckon I'd just as well eat!" he mumbled. "It's here!"

But Solemn's interest was not in food. The sight of it half sickened him. He held the plate on his lap for a moment, then set it aside for Versus.

She sniffed at the beans, nosed a couple indifferently onto the ground, turned aside and stood moodily, with drooping head and long ears hanging despondently forward.

Versus's refusal to eat added to Solemn's uneasiness.

"Somethin' sure as hell is fatal!" he exclaimed. "Here's Versus which won't eat beans!"

For a little longer Solemn listened, hoping to hear Justice's bell. No sound came out of the darkness.

Solemn was convinced by now that some accident had befallen Dirty Shirt or Jus-

tice, or both. He could endure the suspense no longer.

With sudden determination, he arose, got the camp lantern, lighted it, and started resolutely out into the night in the direction Dirty Shirt and Justice had gone, toward the long, sloping spur of Dead Angel Mountain, behind which was Hydrophobia Gulch.

Versus followed.

Solemn picked his way carefully, avoiding cactus, badger holes, ant hills, and other obstructions of the desert. Occasionally he paused to listen, or strain his eyes toward Hydrophobia Gulch, in the hope that he might hear the jangle of Justice's bell, or perchance see her white, ghostlike form silhouetted on the star-studded horizon afar.

But he saw nothing and heard nothing.

As Solemn and Versus proceeded, the feeling of impending disaster which he had experienced when he awakened and found that Justice and Dirty Shirt were missing, grew more profound. It weighed heavier and still heavier upon his mind.

He thought of a thousand things that might have happened to Dirty Shirt, any one of which could result in his death or injury. Old age, itself, may have caused him to sink exhausted, somewhere along the way he had gone.

Solemn could imagine Dirty Shirt, so stricken, lying gasping out his life alone, with none save blind Justice beside him to render aid. He may have been bitten by a rattlesnake, a Gila monster, a scorpion, a centipede, a vinegarroon, a hydrophobia cat, or some other of the multitudinous venomous reptiles, insects or animals that inhabited the region in which they were sojourning.

Solemn pictured Dirty Shirt, writhing in convulsions, his body swollen, tongue protruding, his brown eyes set and glassy, tortured with agony as the insidious poison seeped through his veins, beside some black ledge of rock or perhaps a giant cat-claw, or cholo cactus. He may have fallen from some cliff.

And Solemn, in his overstimulated mental state, could see Dirty Shirt dead, dying, mangled, unable to move or cry out for help—although such a cry, could he utter it, would be worse than futile in the unpeopled desolation and solitude and isolation overspreading Dead Angel Mountain and the adjacent desert.

Filled with such unhappy conjectures, Solemn hurried onward, Versus following close at his heels.

VIII

A QUARTER of a mile from camp, Versus stopped suddenly, and held up her head, her long ears forward, listening. She stood so for a moment, then put her nose to the ground, sniffing nervously about.

Solemn watched the burro, surprised at her actions.

Exactly as a dog of hunting breed searches for the trail of its quarry, Versus behaved. Soon, with her muzzle close to the ground, sniffing as she went, she started eagerly forward.

"Danged if I don't believe that fool burro's trailin' Justice an' Dirty Shirt!" Solemn exclaimed in amazement. "She either hears 'em, sees 'em, or smells 'em, or I'm a liar!"

Solemn followed Versus now.

For an hour they toiled onward.

Near the head of Hydrophobia Gulch, a short distance from where the gorge ended abruptly in a sheer rock wall that fell away, like the cliff of an abandoned waterfall, from a little volcanic sink or basin in the mountainside, and perhaps a half mile below the summit of Dead Angel Mountain, Versus stopped. She raised her head and brayed long and loudly, her eyes meanwhile looking forward into the darkness.

There was a moment's silence.

Solemn's heart gave a leap of joy. He heard the faint jangling of Justice's bell.

With Versus, he hurried toward the sound, and discovered Justice standing, motionless, in the little basin. Apparently, the blind, white pack horse had been standing for hours in the same place.

As Solemn and Versus came near, Justice gave a low, pathetic whinny. A half dozen steps below her was the brink of the precipice, forty or fifty feet high, which was the upper end of the gorge.

Solemn's first thought, when he noticed this, was that Dirty Shirt had fallen over the cliff. He stood in the small circle of yellow light given out by the lantern and looked anxiously around, listening.

"For Gawd's sake!"

Solemn jumped. It was Dirty Shirt's voice.

"Give me a chaw of tobacco an' a drink of water," the voice continued. "An' watch out for that damned rattlesnake!"

Even yet Solemn had not located Dirty Shirt.

A few yards to the left of Solemn, as he faced down the cañon, a rough, sharp basalt dike, ten or fifteen feet in length, projected upward a few feet above the steep slope of the gorge. Back of the dike was a low cliff of some chalklike formation, and between the foot of the cliff and the basalt ledge was a narrow path, a yard wide, the volcanic outcropping forming a sort of retaining wall on its cañon side.

"Where—where be you?" Solemn called, tremulously.

"Here I be!" Dirty Shirt replied, his voice queerly blending plaintiveness and petty impatience, and coming from behind the basalt ridge. "Give me that chaw of tobacco an' drink of water. An' watch out for that damn rattlesnake or you'll step on him, he's darn near drove me crazy all evenin'. I could hear him an' smell him, but I couldn't see him, an' I was afraid he'd stampede Justice and make her break her darn fool old skinny neck! Give her a drink of water, too. Th' bag is hangin' on the packsaddle. But watch out for that danged snake!"

A twinge of remorse stung Solemn when Dirty Shirt said he feared the rattlesnake would stampede Justice, and make her break her "darn fool old skinny neck!" The words were to Solemn a reproachful echo, almost verbatim, of his own wicked hope, expressed a few hours before as he watched Dirty Shirt and Justice leave the camp.

In the narrow natural path between the basalt dike and the low crumbling cliff, Solemn found Dirty Shirt. He was lying on his left side, his legs and the lower part of his body buried under a mass of the shale matter which had come down in a small avalanche from the little bluff, and covered him.

Solemn handed Dirty Shirt his plug of tobacco.

"Mine's in my under-pants pocket, an' I can't get to it," Dirty Shirt said, biting off a chunk of the plug. "Gosh, I've been danged near insane for a chaw. Gawd, that tastes good!"

Solemn turned away for the water.

"Give Justice a drink first!" Dirty Shirt called.

Solemn poured out a hatful of the water for Justice, returned to Dirty Shirt, gave him a drink, and then hung the canvas

water bag on a sharp projection on the outer wall of the little basalt dike.

"Did you see that blamed rattlesnake?" Dirty Shirt asked, after swallowing copious drafts from the bag.

"No, but I smelled him," Solemn answered. "I can smell him yet!"

"So can I smell him—an' I've smelled him till I'm sick of smellin' him!" Dirty Shirt complained. "I wisht you could kill him—"

"He's probably gone in the rocks for the night," Solemn interrupted. "How'd this thing happen, anyhow?"

"Well, I noticed this basalt and shale contact," Dirty Shirt explained, "an' thought I'd pick around on it a little, an' maybe find something—an' the dog-gone stuff slid. How'd you find me an' Justice here?"

"Versus—she trailed you."

"Trailed us? Smelled us?" Dirty Shirt asked, incredulously.

"Just like a hound. I'll get you out in a little while. Where's th' shovel?"

"'Twas layin' by Justice. I don't think she's moved all evenin'! I was usin' the pick, an' it's covered up under me. Gawd, this tobacco's good! I was so danged hungry for it, I've a notion to swallow some of it, too!"

"Think you're hurt much?" Solemn asked, returning with the shovel.

"No," Dirty Shirt answered. "Just my legs an' hips squashed a little. They're kind of numb, but I don't think anything's busted."

To remove the shale which was holding Dirty Shirt down, Solemn had to climb over his partner's body and, owing to the outward bulge of the cliff, crouch in the narrow, trenchlike path, at Dirty Shirt's feet. As Solemn began shoveling the debris cautiously over the low basalt dike into the cañon, Dirty Shirt called warningly:

"You got to be darned careful an' don't bump against that rotten outcroppin', or some more of it 'll come down!"

By the light of the lantern, which Solemn had set on top of the basalt dike, he could see that the face of the cliff was eroded and worn until it was little more than a mass of tremulous pillars, shaped by the elements into queer and grotesque forms which stood perpendicularly on perilously insecure foundations.

Solemn realized that it was a precarious situation, especially at the place where he

was compelled to work. But to reassure Dirty Shirt, he affected scorn of the danger, and replied:

"There ain't much chance—"

"There's a darned good chance of it crumblin' again!" Dirty Shirt interrupted. "An' if it does come down, it's liable to catch you, too, an' also bury me total an' make an abject funeral out of this whole danged thing!"

"Tain't likely," Solemn declared lightly, but shoveling carefully. "It's just about impossible for th' same thing to happen th' same way in th' same place twice in th' same day."

"It's impossible things that happen sometimes!" Dirty Shirt insisted. "So, watch out—an' go darned easy!"

For awhile Solemn worked silently.

"Does it feel like I'm gettin' any of it off—" he began.

IX

THE end of the shovel handle scraped against the barely balanced pillars of the low cliff behind him. The instant he felt the contact, Solemn, still crouched, whirled in a desperate effort to throw himself out of the narrow trench at its lower end.

Before he could straighten up, the slide came down on him. The shovel flew from his hand and knocked the lantern from the basalt dike, and both went clattering into the darkness of the gorge.

Solemn was crushed, face downward, beneath the weight that flowed onto him. His effort to escape saved him from being entirely covered, and, like Dirty Shirt, only his legs and the lower part of his body were buried.

A groan came from Dirty Shirt's lips.

"My Gawd!" he exclaimed, amid the cloud of dust and darkness that enveloped them. "Th' impossible thing—happened. Did it catch you, Solemn?"

"I—I—reckon it—did," Solemn answered, his voice sounding muffled with agony. "I—don't know how much—is—on me. But it's got my legs an' back—pinned down—till I can't move 'em—or turn over. Did—any more come—on you?"

Much more had come down on Dirty Shirt, but he lied.

"Not much, I reckon," he replied. "Maybe a little more. It don't seem any heavier especially—but I can't seem to wriggle my feet now!"

There was a long silence.

The situation was so absurd, yet so tragic, that Solemn and Dirty Shirt were at first stunned by it. That they should both be caught in such a trap, in such a manner, seemed unbelievable to them. It was a ghastly, impossible nightmare.

Like animals that have nearly, but not quite, escaped the heavy log of a deadfall, and are held fast, conscious of their awful plight yet powerless to free themselves, and must wait and watch a terrible death creep upon them, so were Solemn and Dirty Shirt caught by the treacherous shale that had fallen upon them.

They could not hope for human help.

The very isolation of Dead Angel Mountain had been its chief lure to Solemn and Dirty Shirt. Surrounded by miles of forbidding desert, the mighty mountain stood alone in splendid, stately solitude.

Rarely, if ever, did men pass that way. Even the few Mohave or Digger Indians that as yet roamed these waterless wastes shunned, as an evil thing, Dead Angel Mountain. The legend that the good Manitou once banished a recalcitrant angel to its barren, treeless summit gave to Dead Angel Mountain its name.

Unable to endure the fearful loneliness, the dreadful silence, the wayward child of heaven died of heartbreak in the place of its cruel exile. Living savages, peopling their imaginations with the creatures of superstition, turned aside when their paths led toward this somber yet magnificent temple of desolation.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt knew, as they lay in the darkness, that their situation was hopeless. A prayer for human assistance would be almost as futile as a spoken command to the basalt dike to sink again into the earth, and let the mass of shale that was heaped upon them flow down into the black abyss of Hydrophobia Gulch, and free them by the same law—the law of gravitation—which now imprisoned and held them fast.

To cry out would be a waste of breath.

The thought came to Solemn Johnson that some super-Satan, æons ago, had pushed up from hell the hard volcanic ridge of basalt, set beside it the soft half-rock formation, and through the centuries little demons of wind and fierce imps of the disintegrating sun had whittled at the face of the cliff, shaping, carving, chiseling the whole into a death trap for the destined

purpose of catching Dirty Shirt and himself unawares.

The weird fantasy caused Solemn to laugh aloud and mutter:

"Gosh, I—I—must be—wanderin'!"

"What 'd you say?" Dirty Shirt called, from his end of the living grave.

"I—said," Solemn replied, "I—must be—wanderin'."

"I wisht to Gawd I could wander!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed, with pathetic, unconscious humor.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt lapsed into silence. Save for the numbness and sense of weight on their bodies, they suffered none.

At rare intervals there was a faint jangle of Justice's bell. Versus made no noise. She had bedded down near the blind white pack horse, and seemed content.

Neither Solemn nor Dirty Shirt complained. With stoical fortitude the two venerable prospectors awaited what each knew would be a slow, terrible death.

There would come thirst, exhaustion, heat. When the sun flamed above the desert's rim, and poured down on their unsheltered heads, its wrath would put the seal of eternal silence on their parched and delirious lips. It would blot out forever from their bursting eyes, before the day was done, its own pitiless, blinding, dreadful glare.

For a long time neither Solemn nor Dirty Shirt spoke.

"Wonder what—time—it is?" Solemn finally asked. "Th' night—must be—gettin' along. My watch—is—under me—an' I can't get it."

"Mine's on top of me," Dirty Shirt replied, "but I can't get my matches, an' it's too darned dark to tell. Must be gettin' t'ward mornin', though. Gawd, I'm glad I got this tobacco! Don't believe I could endure without it to chaw."

Dirty Shirt suddenly remembered that he had kept Solemn's plug.

"Was that all the tobacco you had, Solemn?" he called. "Have you got any for yourself?"

Solemn had none, but had not mentioned the fact.

"I—I—can get—along—"

"I didn't think about that bein' all you had," Dirty Shirt broke in, self-reproachfully. "If it wasn't so dark maybe I could pitch a piece over to you, but I'm afraid we'd lose it."

"Never mind—I can—get—along," Solemn repeated.

And again there was silence.

X

DAY came, with the deceptive freshness of a desert dawn.

The stars dissolved in a gray film that suddenly covered the sky from horizon to horizon. A seductive, almost damp coolness filled the air.

A splash of coral pink came on the eastern rim of the desert. It grew larger, and, as it grew, streams of itself flowed north and south until that whole edge of the earth was fringed with a border of the same exquisite hue.

The grayness of the sky settled down on the slopes of the mountains. The ocean of sand drifts took on a mistlike softness. The deep cañons were pools of dark purple.

And there was utter silence over all.

The fringe of coral pink swelled upward into an arch. From its center there shot skyward shafts of searchlight whiteness, spaced between other shafts shadowlike in their texture.

A pastel fan opened across the gray of the upper realm and filled half the heavens. A sheen of old rose touched the summit of Dead Angel Mountain, and, like liquid, slowly diffused itself downward over the barren slopes.

The waves of sand dunes lightened to the shade of new-bleached straw. The dark purple of the cañons became a thin, almost cerulean blue.

The taste of the air then, to the lungs of breathing things, was as the taste of water from lime-rock springs to lips that are parched with thirst.

The coral pink arch grew and spread. It became a flood of ruby wine, and blotted out all the delicate pink.

The gentle gray of the sky changed to a metallic hardness. The shafts of light and shadow receded, and as they receded they were shaped into lances of pearl, garnet, amethyst, beryl, gleaming opal, emerald, yellow amber.

The great fan now was a glorified, translucent shell, its edges gilded with brightest beaten gold, and it arose up and up, out of a sea of ruby wine.

There was silence.

All creation was hushed before the awful majesty and splendor of this soundless celestial color.

A yellow flame fell on the top of Dead Angel Mountain and poured downward. The old-rose fled before it, staining with its own loveliness the blue of the cañons.

The cruel, metallic haze of the sky grew harsher, and imposed itself upon the ocean of sand. The sea of ruby wine became angry, scarlet red.

In the neck of the translucent shell there blazed a spot of dazzling, indescribable brilliancy. Instantly, the spot pushed upward, and revealed itself as the rounded edge of a tremendous ball that was rising out of the angry, scarlet-red sea.

The ball grew larger, still larger, and larger yet. Its color was the color of blood and fire. From it there flashed arrows of flame that sped with incredible swiftness over the yellowing ocean of sand.

The sphere pushed upward—and grew—and pushed upward, and a mighty circle of blood and fire leaped, in all its completeness, above the eastern rim of the desert.

The freshness went out of the air. It was dry.

The taste of the air, to the lungs of breathing things, was as the taste of the bitter waters of the Great Dead Sea to the lips of one who dies of thirst.

So the day came to Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith. They were rough, perhaps some would say uncouth, churlish old men of the desert—derelicts of the wastes. And yet they were children of the one common Parent of all creation.

And the day found them imprisoned by treacherous shale in a death trap, at the head of Hydrophobia Gulch, on Dead Angel Mountain, miles from any human habitation, or help.

With daylight, Solemn and Dirty Shirt invoiced their situation.

And they knew it was hopeless.

The main portion of the slide was on their feet, legs, and bodies, to a little above their waists. The weight of the mass was terrific, yet the narrowness of the space between the basalt dike and the low cliff from which the avalanche had come, prevented the full force of the pressure from resting upon them. Otherwise, Solemn and Dirty Shirt would have succumbed long before morning.

There was little danger of additional slides. The entire front of the cliff had already fallen, at least the porous, decomposed portion of it, and the remainder was reasonably firm.

From Dirty Shirt's position, by straining his neck and turning his head, he could peer around the upper end of the volcanic dike and look down into the small depression where Solemn and Versus first discovered Justice.

The blind white pack horse stood in the same place where Dirty Shirt had left her the afternoon before. Apparently, Justice had not moved during the entire night. Versus was standing quietly near by.

Throughout the night, Justice's bell had been silent, except at long intervals, and then it had sounded only gently. With the coming of day, she began, frequently and impatiently, to shake her head, causing the bell to jangle loudly and with violence in its vibrations.

Even when full daylight had come, the mound of piled up shale between Solemn and Dirty Shirt prevented them from seeing each other.

Dirty Shirt was first to break the silence. "Solemn!" he called. "Are you asleep?"

For a moment there was no answer. Dirty Shirt feared that his partner was already unconscious or dead. While the fear was yet in his mind, there came the half hope that it was true; that Solemn had passed beyond the veil of consciousness and would escape the agony which Dirty Shirt knew full well the coming hours would bring.

"My—legs—an' about half—my body—is," Solemn called back. "They're numb. But th'—rest of me—is—awake."

Solemn's voice showed that he suffered greatly.

"It—it's light now!" Dirty Shirt shouted. "Maybe I can pitch a chunk of this tobacco over to you and—"

"Never—mind," Solemn interrupted. "You better—not—try it. Th'—chances are—it 'd hit—where I—couldn't reach—it—an' be—lost. Keep it—for—yourself."

"I'm goin' to pitch it!" Dirty Shirt cried. "Wait a minute. Maybe I can fix it so I can throw it straight."

Dirty Shirt managed, with his free hand, to get a soiled bandanna handkerchief from his pocket. He held the plug between his teeth, and twisted it apart, placed the larger half in the handkerchief, put a small stone with it, and, with his teeth and hand, tied the handkerchief into a bag so the tobacco and stone would not fall out.

"Here she comes!" he yelled to Solemn.

"Watch out! I tied a rock up with it so I could throw it better. Be careful, or it'll hit your head!"

XI

CAREFULLY estimating the distance over the pile of shale, Dirty Shirt tossed the awkward missile. It struck the cliff, and rolled down into the trench a couple of feet beyond Solemn's head.

"Did you get it?" Dirty Shirt called.

"Not—yet—but I—think I can."

Stretching his hand as far forward as he could Solemn managed to clutch the edge of the handkerchief, and drew its precious contents to him.

"Now—I—got—it!" he called again, taking—more eagerly than Dirty Shirt knew—a chew of the tobacco.

"Pitchin'—that—tobacco was—kind of—thoughtful—of you—Dirty Shirt!" Solemn added after a moment. "I'm—much—obliged."

"'Twasn't nothin'," Dirty Shirt answered. "Only just fair. We've been splittin' for forty years on grub an' water an' work an'—royalties from th' borax mine. It's too late, now, not to split on tobacco."

When Dirty Shirt spoke of the borax mine, and the royalties it had produced for Solemn and himself, there came to the minds of both the large sum of money on deposit to their credit in Los Angeles banks. It seemed ironical that with hundreds of thousands of dollars at their call, they should now be dying, unable to purchase even one small drop of water to cool their lips; that they would never be able to use that golden stream of wealth.

Answering their mutual thought, Solemn called to Dirty Shirt:

"Th'—borax—mine—has been—quite a—success, ain't—it? We—got—five hundred—thousand—dollars down—there—in—Los Angeles—now—" Solemn paused.

"Yes, an' I'd give th' whole damn works," Dirty Shirt replied, with a forced laugh, "to get out from under this pile of shale just once.

"I can smell that damned rattlesnake again!" he broke off in sudden alarm.

"Can you smell him?"

"No," Solemn answered. "He must—be—on your—end."

Dirty Shirt craned his neck and peered around.

"My gosh A'mighty!" he shouted.

"He is on this end! He's comin' out of a little crack in the bluff."

"You'd better—hold still—an' keep quiet," Solemn called.

"If I could get a rock big enough," Dirty Shirt replied, "he's th' one I'd make keep quiet!"

But Dirty Shirt took Solemn's advice, and silently watched the snake as, with hideous, wedge-shaped head elevated a little, it crept slowly, horrible in its sinuous gracefulness, down out of the cliff. It wound cautiously to one side of a spiny bed of prickly pear, and stopped a dozen feet from Dirty Shirt's head, while its rattles kept up a gentle whirring.

Dirty Shirt cringed, wondering which way it would go.

Versus held up her head, and sniffed the air suspiciously. She, too, evidently detected the sickening, musky odor of the snake.

Justice, her nostrils dilated, her body trembling, stood in rigid fear. Her senses of smell and hearing told her of the presence of the venomous scourge of the desert, which her sightless, pathetic eyes could not see.

The rattlesnake moved onward, carefully, advancing and pausing, down the slope into the little basin, toward Justice and Versus. Dirty Shirt gazed at the thing, horror and revulsion in his eyes.

Versus suddenly discovered the thick, diamond-mottled threat moving with sinister, lazy assurance toward her. The little burro stood motionless as the rattlesnake crept onward.

Her eyes were fixed on the flexible, muscular folds, and her body tensed to the rigidity of stone, as she measured the slow, sure approach of the rattlesnake, creeping toward her and Justice, a couple of yards away.

The reptile advanced, its beady eyes glistening, its undulating five-foot length contracting, expanding, pushing forward with fascinating, relentless deliberation.

A yard from Versus the snake stopped—for an instant.

In that instant the little mouse-colored burro leaped, and, quicker than the upward, lightninglike stab of the deadly fangs, four small, iron-hard hoofs, bunched closely together, came down like a sledge of death on the rattlesnake's head. Again and again Versus sprang on the writhing coils that were lashing in the frenzy of

mortal injury, the rattles whirring in incessant, impotent fury.

Poor blind Justice—accustomed to trust only a human hand or the weight of her stake rope to guide her, stood snorting in terror. The flesh of her shoulders and flanks was twitching, her whole body was wet with the perspiration of fear, and she dared not move.

The whir of the rattles grew less, and the contortions and writhings more feeble. There was a convulsive tremor of the mangled body, and the rattlesnake was dead.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed to Solemn, forgetting for the instant his own unhappy dilemma in his admiration of Versus's heroic act. "I wisht to Gawd you could 'a' seen Versus kill that cussed snake!"

"Did—she—kill—it?"

"She squashed it!" Dirty Shirt called back.

"I've—seen—her—squash 'em," Solemn remarked, his voice sounding broken and tired. "I—saw her—squash—that one—you remember—that was about—to—bite—your leg—at that—other—water seep—over on—th' other—side of—Dead Angel—Mountain—that time?"

When the rattlesnake lay still, Versus sniffed at the motionless body, turned around, backed up to her conquered enemy, and seemingly dozed. But occasionally, as if remembering something, she lashed out contemptuously with one or the other of her hind feet at the dead reptile.

Justice's fear finally subsided, and the blind white pack horse stood quietly again in her pathetic attitude of patient waiting. At regular intervals she shook her head and caused her bell to jangle loudly.

XII

THE sun climbed higher. The air grew hotter and dryer.

All night both Solemn and Dirty Shirt had suffered terrible thirst. The canvas water bag hung on the outer side of the basalt dike, a few feet from them—but beyond the reach of either.

With the torrid blaze of the morning sun their craving for water became a torture. It seemed to them that their bodies were being turned into mere hulks of dry ashes.

Not since the coming of day, nor during the night that was gone, had Solemn or Dirty Shirt mentioned the thirst that was

consuming them. With Apache or Yaqui stolidity, each endured his agony, knowing that the suffering of the other was fully equal to his own.

Talk, because of the dryness of their throats and the thirst slime that filled their mouths, and their already swollen tongues and lips, was becoming more and more an agonizing effort.

Although Dirty Shirt had been under the slide longer than Solemn, yet, perhaps because of Solemn's greater age, and the more painful position in which he was held, Solemn seemed to be weakening the faster. When Solemn last spoke, Dirty Shirt knew from his voice that it would not be long until, when he called to Solemn, there would be no answer.

Only the regular, persistent jangle of Justice's bell when she shook her head, broke the parched stillness of the air. At times Solemn and Dirty Shirt seemed to hear the bell at a great distance, as if they dozed; at other times it clattered forth with startling clearness and volume.

"I—wisht—to—Gawd—I—had—a—gun!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed, brokenly, thickly, immediately after one of the almost signal-like clamorings of Justice's bell.

Solemn heard Dirty Shirt's words.

The natural thought flashed to his mind. Their condition was hopeless; hours of agony; thirst; torture; delirium awaited them. A pistol shot—

"No! No!" Solemn groaned, struggling to articulate. "No! You—wouldn't—couldn't—do—that—Dirty Shirt!"

Dirty Shirt understood.

"I—wasn't—thinkin'—of—that—but of—us," he replied, his own voice coming with harsh, rasping, gasps. "I—we—can—stick—it out! I—was—thinkin'—of—of—Justice—stumblin'—blind—huntin'—huntin'—water—an' not findin' it. Versus—will—probably—get back—to—to—Red Bluff."

There was a pause.

"It—will—be—hell—for—Justice," Solemn agreed, each word a struggle. "It—must—be—awful—to—to—be—always—in—th'—dark."

Solemn finished the sentence with a moan.

Dirty Shirt turned his head and peered upward into the sky, now a great, inverted, polished bowl of brass, extending over and covering the whole earth, and radiating downward a heat of terrific intensity. High

above him, he saw a black speck floating in silent, ominous circles. He shut his bloodshot eyes.

"Damn—that—that—buzzard!" Dirty Shirt gasped. "Why—couldn't—it—have—waited!"

He remembered, and was glad that Solemn, if still conscious, was lying in such a position that he could not see the gruesome, floating prophecy of death. Unable to resist the impulse, Dirty Shirt looked again into the sky.

Another black speck had joined the first. They were lower.

Dirty Shirt knew that these feathered ghouls of the air would not touch earth while there was life in the body of the creature of their awful desire.

The buzzards came lower—still lower.

Their approach filled Dirty Shirt with a sudden, startling alarm.

"Solemn!" he called. "Solemn—are—are—you—"

Solemn's voice came back faintly:

"I'm—all—right. Only—kind—of—tired."

A frenzy of rebellion swept over Dirty Shirt. He tore with his free hand at the mass of shale upon him; his fingers bled.

With eyes closed, face contorted with agony and rage, blindly, furiously, he clawed at the cinder-hot pile of earth that held him fast.

Suddenly, the wild absurdity of his efforts struck him as something intolerably funny. He laughed, a ghastly, guttural, insane sound. The spasm passed. He relaxed, as if dead.

Again Dirty Shirt opened his eyes and looked up into the furnace-hot sky. The black specks were wheeling—wheeling—with the same hellish patience.

"Damn—them—buzzards," he snarled, chokingly. "They—make me—nervous!"

And Dirty Shirt did not realize the heartbreaking humor of the sentence.

The seconds were hours, the minutes ages.

"Solemn—Solemn!"

An unintelligible moan, the effort of a tongue swollen and dry beyond the power to function, was the only reply.

Again and again blind white Justice shook her head. Over and over the metallic clanging of the bell rang out—stopped—rang out—again and again.

Versus came and stood near Dirty Shirt's head, looking down upon him curiously, a

puzzled wonderment in her big brown eyes. Her rough muzzle—dry, hot, harsh—touched his forehead.

Dirty Shirt reached out, caught the shaggy, dusty wool on Versus's jaw in his hand, and gripped it, holding fast. Versus stood patiently.

After awhile Dirty Shirt again opened his eyes. He thought he had slept.

His fingers still clutched the coarse hair on Versus's jaw. He clung to it, as if in some way the faithful little mouse-colored burro would hold him back—could hold him back—from the ocean of blackness into which he was slipping.

His eyes were stabbed with a million needle-points of pain. He looked upward once more. The buzzards were lower—lower—scarcely above the smooth, sun-swept summit of Dead Angel Mountain.

He could see the dull, soiled black of their breasts, the spread, motionless wings; the repulsive, featherless, snakelike heads—almost the terrible eagerness in their eyes.

Again a delirium of fury seized Dirty Shirt.

"Gawd—Gawd—them—things!" he gasped horribly, frenziedly, and the curses that he added were more a prayer than oaths. His soul was fighting, a rebel even yet unconquered, refusing to surrender to this thing that had come upon him.

Justice's bell jangled.

"Justice—Solemn—Versus—" Dirty Shirt muttered, incoherently.

He unclenched the hand that clung to Versus. Then he remembered.

"Versus—go—go on—Red—Bluff Back—go—on—" he moaned.

XIII

JUSTICE's bell jangled—and stopped—suddenly.

Dirty Shirt painfully turned his head and looked down into the little basin. Justice stood breathlessly still, her head turned aside, listening, her sightless eyes straining toward the summit of Dead Angel Mountain. A low whinny came from her distended nostrils.

Dirty Shirt raised his own throbbing eyes in the direction Justice was facing. His breath stopped.

Two men stood at the upper edge of the small basin, looking curiously at Justice.

Dirty Shirt shut his eyes. It could not be. It was a trick of delirium, a cruel hal-

lucination, a mirage. Once more Dirty Shirt looked.

It was true! They were men. His dulling senses recognized one of them—Mexican Joe, a character about Red Bluff. The other, Dirty Shirt did not know.

The two men had not yet discovered Dirty Shirt. He felt himself slipping into that ocean of blackness.

"Here—" he moaned.

He tried to shout: "Water—Solemn—give—"

Then the blackness covered everything.

The Heaven-sent taste of water was on his lips, moisture was in his throat, on his tongue, his fire-hot face, his forehead, when Dirty Shirt opened his eyes.

The water came from the canteen in the hand of the stranger, bending above Dirty Shirt. Mexican Joe, leaning over him, vigorously fanned Dirty Shirt's head with his sombrero.

Dirty Shirt flung up his hand, and pushed the canteen away.

"Sol—Solemn—I—I—said—" He choked with an almost wolfish snarl. "Damn you—Joe! Solemn—I—said—yonder—"

He motioned feebly toward the other end of the slide. "Water—quick!—Solemn—I—said!"

His head dropped forward, his body slumped, and Dirty Shirt gave himself up to the exquisite dream that he was lying in a green, shaded cañon, beside a little mountain waterfall, with mist gently dropping upon his face.

Mexican Joe understood and obeyed the message.

Solemn's senses answered the reviving touch of water. He, too, opened his eyes. With his first consciousness his blackened lips, by an awful effort, muttered:

"Dir—Dirty Shirt—is—he— Water—give—him—"

He was forced to pause.

"Señor Dirty Shirt, he is O. K." Mexican Joe replied. "*Muy buena! Drink, señor—a little—poco mas agua.*"

Solemn and Dirty Shirt reacted quickly to the saving water, and the mental stimulus of the almost miraculous prospect of rescue. Joe found the shovel after the stranger had divided the contents of the canvas water bag between Justice and Versus, and in a short time enough of the slide to permit Solemn and Dirty Shirt's release

was shoveled over the basalt dike into the cañon below.

Blind white Justice and Versus, led by the stranger and Mexican Joe, carried the rescued prospectors down the mountain over the trail that, it seemed to Solemn and Dirty Shirt, they had come ages ago. And two hours later the old men, their bodies bruised and still numb, unable yet to walk, but, except for the shock, heat, and exhaustion, not seriously injured, were once more in the shade of their own camp at the oasislike spring above Ground Hog Flat.

Mexican Joe was sent by the stranger to his own camp, on the other side of Dead Angel Mountain, to bring the light automobile truck in which he would take Solemn and Dirty Shirt, that night, back to Red Bluff, leaving Mexican Joe to follow with the live stock. The two faithful animals now stood near by, Justice contentedly munching a pan of oats, and Versus, too, enjoying a meal of the same delectable equine delicacy.

Not until then was that providential appearance of the stranger and Mexican Joe explained.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt reclined on their blankets, still dazed from their experience, and suffering some from their bruised and long compressed bodies. The stranger, having rendered such first aid as was possible, squatted by one of the Joshua trees near them.

"I—don't know who you are," Solemn began, haltingly, to the man who had appeared so opportunely in his and Dirty Shirt's last extremity, "but I'm sure much obliged for you arrivin' so dog-gone handy, just when Dirty Shirt and me was needin' somebody to show up so dog-gone seriously as we did."

"If you hadn't showed up just when you an' Mexican Joe did show up," Dirty Shirt chimed in, "I figure—"

He hesitated and shuddered. "Them damned buzzards would just about now be—well—"

He broke off, as if the gruesome thought was too much to utter.

"Anyhow," he went on, "your comin' was a mighty appropriate, providential, p-sy-chological coin-cidence!"

"It sure as hell was 'sickological—" Solemn began.

"P-sy-chological coin-cidence," Dirty Shirt repeated, glancing reprovingly at Solemn. "It's the first time Solemn an' me

have ever run into anybody, or had anybody run into us up here on Dead Angel Mountain."

The stranger, a rather slender, middle-aged individual, apparently of some professional employment, chuckled softly. A twinkle, indicating that he could appreciate humor, came into his dark eyes.

"I've been thinking of the somewhat unusual 'psychological coincidence' of the thing myself." The stranger laughed.

"Perhaps," he went on, "it might entertain you gentlemen, while you are resting, and Mexican Joe has gone for the car, if I tell you the rather peculiar way in which it happened that we—"

"It would be interestin'," Dirty Shirt broke in eagerly.

"I'd like to hear it," Solemn added, taking a fresh chew of tobacco, and handing the plug to Dirty Shirt.

XIV

"My name—" the stranger began, and hesitated. "It really doesn't matter—but, well, for purposes of lucidity, my name is John Lewis Cramer, and my occupation—if any—" He laughed again. "Is—"

At the mention of the name, Solemn and Dirty Shirt showed instant recognition.

"You write!" Solemn interrupted with great interest. "You write books. Dirty Shirt an' me read one of your novels, 'The White Tolteci.'"

The novelist held up his hand, stopping Solemn.

"Try to write, is better!" He laughed once more. "And a lot of editors agree with me that *try* is about all!"

"Because of one of those editors," he went on, glancing toward Justice, "and your faithful, sightless friend, we three are here!" He paused, and the twinkle in his eyes deepened.

"And, yet," he proceeded, musingly, "if I should write the incidents of this morning into a story, and associate my really lovable—even if great, and sometimes brutally frank—editor friend, in his New York office, with a blind white pack horse in the loneliest spot of the Nevada Desert, and make them the joint instruments of Providence to bring about this happy situation in which we now find ourselves, and then laid the story on his desk, I think I know just about how he would react!"

The novelist enjoyed, in silence, for a moment, the imaginary scene.

"It would be about like this," he continued. "He would glance at it, get red in the face, 'scrootch' down in his chair, light a long black cigar, and say: 'For God's sake, Cramer, don't pull anything like this on me! Write something that *can* happen. If I printed this wild fantasy, there'd be ten thousand "don't kid us letters" hit my desk within a week after the magazine was on the stands.'"

"Well, anyhow," Solemn remarked, "you showin' up when you did spoiled a darned good meal for them buzzards Dirty Shirt was talkin' about."

"Well, of all things!" Dirty Shirt broke in, fretfully, turning toward Solemn. "Can't you ever quit mentionin' uncomfortable reminders?"

Solemn and Cramer grinned.

"Yet, it is true," the novelist resumed. "The editor I am thinking about has a very definite part in this episode. Three weeks ago he called me into his office, and instead of handing me the check I was expecting, he returned the manuscript of my last submitted story, and, totally disregarding my sensitive feelings—dealt out one of his characteristic verbal chastisements. I think I can quote it, because I'm sure I'll always remember it!"

"Take it away," Cramer quoted. "'Take it away, John Lewis. You're slipping, old kid! This stuff is the limit—rotten—flat! You're getting worse. The first thing you know you'll be doing this sloppy, modern, neurotic, European sex-idiocy!"

"This hurts me worse than it does you, John, boy, but you've got it coming. You've been in New York too long—it's getting you! Beat it! Get out! Go somewhere—West! Find the loneliest spot on earth. Sit down on it!"

"Look at real, honest-to-God things close up. Forget all this flapping, hand-painted, make-believe thing we kid ourselves into calling "high life." Then write something for me—something that's got a taste of reality to it. Go on! Beat it! Get to hell out of here—and, *God bless you!*"

As he finished quoting the one-sided conversation, Cramer leaned back against the Joshua tree, filled his pipe and grinned in pleasant retrospection of the enlivening incident.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt smiled, too, at the recital.

"He had a darned good command of

language!" Dirty Shirt remarked, admiringly. "Didn't he?"

"He did—and still has!" the novelist continued.

"He's so blamed good that he made me mad—and I took his advice! That same day I was on the westbound limited when it pulled out.

"In Los Angeles, I inquired for the 'lonest spot on earth.' The clerk at the hotel said: 'Barstow!' At Barstow they referred me to Red Bluff, which I reached yesterday morning. Some one there pointed to Dead Angel Mountain and said: 'That's it!'

"Mexican Joe came along out here to show me the way and cook our beans and bacon. At sundown yesterday we camped on the other side of the mountain. Joe said he knew a place over there that was real lonesome. Last night I thought he was a good guesser, that it was the 'lonest spot on earth!'

"This morning, desiring to achieve the ultimate of lonesomeness—and witness the sunrise—with Mexican Joe, I climbed to the mountaintop. We heard the cowbell. At first I thought some one had played a trick on me and there was a dairy ranch on this side of the mountain. But the bell kept ringing with such odd regularity—as if it were trying to signal—that we decided to investigate. You know the rest!"

There was a breathless hush for a few moments.

Hot as it was, Solemn and Dirty Shirt shivered as they thought of the morning's horror.

Whimsically, Cramer recapitulated.

"If the editor had not scolded me; if I had not taken the train that same day out of New York; if your loyal blind white pack horse had not stood in that one spot so patiently, with such insistent faithfulness, shaking her head, ringing her bell, well—" The novelist waved his hand significantly, as if the result need not be named.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt understood.

"I'm—damned glad that editor give you that bawlin' out!" Solemn muttered, fervently, his voice trembling a bit.

"I'm damned—glad—you didn't miss that train!" Dirty Shirt added, earnestly.

"To make it unanimous," Cramer remarked, some emotion in his own voice, as he arose and went to give the blind white

pack horse more water, "I'm damned glad Justice rung her bell!"

XV

THE old prospectors sat up on their blankets and watched the blind white pack horse gratefully empty the canvas water bucket Cramer held before her. By common impulse Solemn and Dirty Shirt looked into each other's eyes.

And there passed between them a look that said Justice would never again be a gamble-horse—to change masters on the turn of a card, a throw of the dice, the flip of a coin. The best oats, the most luscious hay, the coolest water were to be hers as long as she lived. Solemn and Dirty Shirt knew it, just as they knew that Versus would never crave beans, and be beanless; wish for bacon rinds, and be denied her wish; bray for a bucket of beer, and be beerless.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt gazed into each other's eyes, understood, and grinned.

Again they looked to where Justice was standing.

Cramer had dropped the canvas bucket. He was examining, intently, the sightless eyes of Justice. He turned, a little excitedly, toward Solemn and Dirty Shirt.

"In addition to my other—foolishness," he said, "the studying of horses' eyes—especially blind eyes—has been one of my hobbies since my boyhood days on the farm. This horse has what a veterinarian would call 'heat-cataracts.' I am sure a good surgeon—"

He paused, finishing with a note of regret in his voice: "Of course—under the circumstances—the cost of the operation would be prohibitive."

With a gentle caress of the dingy white hair on Justice's cheek, and a low spoken, "I'm sorry, old girl!" the novelist turned away.

Once more Solemn Johnson's still swollen gray eyes met the yet bloodshot brown eyes of Dirty Shirt Smith. One thought flashed to the minds of both.

There were five hundred thousand dollars of unspent royalties from the borax mine, subject to their check, in the Los Angeles banks. The cost of an operation prohibitive? Solemn and Dirty Shirt grinned at each other.

The days of Justice's blindness were numbered.

"Some Hopes!"

THE SHIP'S COOK ACTS AS PILOT IN THE SEA OF MATRIMONY
AND STRIKES AN UNCHARTED REEF

By F. Morton Howard

CONFRONTED with the question, Mr. Lionel Baxter, cook of the good ship Vivid, set down his mug upon the counter and stepped back to take careful, computative scrutiny of his stout and elderly shipmate.

"Well, since you asks me," Mr. Baxter hazarded, at last, "I should say you was sixty-eight."

Mr. Joseph Turnbull, pained by this estimate, was wrung to the utterance of a hoarse squawk of protest.

"Well, sixty-seven, then," Mr. Baxter amended, obligingly.

Mr. Turnbull waggled his head slowly in injured reproach at his companion.

"Or thereabouts," the accommodating cook further offered.

"I'm—I'm fifty-nine," Mr. Turnbull asserted, and stared quite defiantly at Mr. Baxter.

"Only fifty-nine?" Mr. Baxter demanded, in squeaky, incredulous accents.

"Or thereabouts," Mr. Turnbull hedged.

There was a little pause. Mr. Turnbull's whiskered chin retained its challenging tilt. The cook of the Vivid, staring at his shipmate, whistled something in the nature of a leisurely and melancholy impromptu.

"And I might say," Mr. Turnbull presently resumed, in his loftiest manner, "as there's lots of people says I don't look me age, neither."

"That I can believe," the cook conceded. "You don't look fifty-nine. You look more like ninety, only I was being perlite."

Haughtily, Mr. Turnbull picked up his mug and removed himself from propinquity with Mr. Baxter. A speckled and faded mirror over the mantelshelf furnished the offended mariner with opportunity to survey his visage, and this he did critically, assuming a variety of expressions designed

to exhibit his features at their most impressive angle.

Scornfully, Mr. Baxter watched the elderly Narcissus.

"Try looking at the back of your 'ead, Joe," Mr. Baxter taunted. "That's easy the 'andsomest part of your face."

"It's a honest, straightforward, manly face," Mr. Turnbull stoutly averred, "and I don't care what you say. And, what's more, there's many a woman would be only too pleased to get a face like that with 'er 'usband, so there!"

A startled tremor coursed through the cook, and he blinked. He regarded Mr. Turnbull with a sort of swelling suspicion.

"'Uusband?" Mr. Baxter queried. "You—you don't mean to say—"

"I do," Mr. Turnbull calmly admitted.

"So that's why you've started to take a interest in yourself, all of a sudden! Wanting to know 'ow old you look, and all the rest of it! Oh, well," Mr. Baxter concluded, "I've always 'eard there was no fool like a old fool, and now I knows it!"

"A man's as young as 'e feels," Mr. Turnbull maintained, turning his back on the mirror. "And I feels like a real three-year-old."

"'Orse or hegg?" the cook inquired.

"In the prime o' life, that's what I am!" Mr. Turnbull vaunted. "Just the right age to marry and give up the sea and settle down to enjoy life ashore."

"Well, there's one thing to be said for the woman as marries you," Mr. Baxter declared. "She must be easy to please, otherwise she wouldn't take up along with the likes o' you."

"And 'ow long's this been going on?" he wanted to know. "And what's 'er name?"

"I don't know the lady's name as yet."

Mr. Baxter regarded his companion with increased interest and scorn.

"You don't mean to say as it's a sort of rowmance?" he asked. "Love at first sight, and that sort of thing?"

"Matter of fack, I ain't ever spoke to the lady yet. Not so far as I'm aware on, anyway."

"You ain't ever—"

"No, nor even seed 'er yet, neither," Mr. Turnbull returned, enjoying the cook's mystification.

"In love with some one what 'e don't know the name of, what 'e's never spoke to, and what 'e's never seed—" the cook murmured, shaking his head helplessly. "I gives it up."

"The hanswer's heasy," Mr. Turnbull asserted. "I'm a-looking round to choose the lady."

"Well, of all the silly old—" Mr. Baxter began, and then checked himself sharply.

For some while Mr. Baxter was silent, and eyed his companion in a tentative and calculative way.

"Putting all joking on one side, Joe," he remarked, at length, "I don't know as you ain't acting very sensible, indeed."

"'Course I am!" Mr. Turnbull acquiesced calmly.

"Very sensible, indeed," the cook repeated, and, crossing to Mr. Turnbull, solemnly accorded him a series of commendatory little pats on the shoulder.

"Much obliged, I'm sure," Mr. Turnbull responded, plainly gratified by this demonstration of approval. "I'm glad you thinks I'm doing the right thing, because I wants your 'elp in it."

"You've got a 'eadpiece, cookie," he testified, admiringly. "You've got brains, you 'ave, as you've proved time and time again. And if you'd just give me a bit of 'elp—"

"In what way?"

"I wants you to 'elp me choose the lucky lady," Mr. Turnbull stated.

II

MR. BAXTER repressed a start of eagerness, but his eyes shone.

"Funny thing," he remarked, "I was just thinking as I might be able to introduce you to the very lady as 'ud suit you."

"'As she got any keppitle?" Mr. Turnbull inquired, at once coming to downright fundamentals.

"What's money where love is concerned, Joe?" the cook propounded, sentimentally. "What's real, true love got to do with money?"

"A dooce of a lot!" Mr. Turnbull affirmed. "You try love without money, and see!"

"But you've got the money, Joe, and if *she* brings the love—"

"I 'ave got a bit of keppitle," Mr. Turnbull admitted. "I been saving up to leave the sea ever since my first ship, pretty nigh. But I ain't got enough, Li'nel. I wants to start a shop. I wants the shop more than I wants a wife, if it comes to that."

"And, if the lady as you've got in your mind ain't got a bit of keppitle, she's no good to me," he averred, ungallantly.

"She—she's got some 'opes," the cook mentioned.

"What sort of 'opes?"

"Prospects," the cook replied, slowly.

"What sort o' prospects?" Mr. Turnbull persisted.

For a time Mr. Baxter was wrapped in cogitation, but his countenance remained uninspired.

"I—I don't know as I ought to discuss 'er private business affairs with you, not at present," he offered, eventually. "Later on, p'raps, when you've come to a understanding between—"

"We shan't come to no understanding, not while I don't know what these 'opes of 'ers are," Mr. Turnbull predicted. "And, anyway, 'oo is the lady? 'Ave I met 'er?"

"Not yet, you ain't, Joe. If you 'ad, you wouldn't talk so off'anded. A wife as any man o' your age might be proud of!" Mr. Baxter eulogized. "Not one of your flighty, 'arum-scarum gals, all legs and laugh, but a plain, sensible, careful, 'ard-working woman, with a mind of 'er own. That's the wife for you, Joe!"

"And where does she live?"

"Why, 'ere, in this very town. I'll take you along and introduce you to 'er any time you like. As a matter of fact—"

Mr. Baxter airily flicked the ash from his cigarette and assumed tones that were markedly careless.

"As a matter of fact," he continued, "the lady I'm talking about 'appens to be my aunt."

"Ah!" Mr. Turnbull commented, acutely.

"And she's been living along with us for a good many years now."

"Ah!" Mr. Turnbull said again.

"Not as we wants to get 'er off our 'ands," the cook urged, rather hurriedly.

"No, o' course not," Mr. Turnbull murmured, looking very cynical.

"She does 'er share in the 'ouse, and she pretty nigh pays for 'er keep," Mr. Baxter stated.

"Thought you said she 'adn't got any keppitle?"

"She goes out to work a goodish bit," Mr. Baxter explained. "Charing and sewing and odd jobbery, you know."

"Then she ought to 'ave saved a bit," Mr. Turnbull declared, severely.

"She don't charge enough," Mr. Baxter averred, with regret. "Often and often we've told 'er as she ought to stick out for 'igher pay, but she always says as the diff'rent people she works for treats 'er well, and she ain't going to put upon them. Too modest, that's what she is, Joe."

"I could put a diff'rent name to it," Mr. Turnbull said.

"Years and years she's been going on like this," the cook remarked. "Used to be a gen'ral servant, one time, she did, and then once she come on 'oliday to me and the missis, soon after we was first married, and there she's been ever since. And 'earty welcome all the time, o' course," he declared, aware that something of fretfulness had crept into his tones.

Mr. Turnbull stood meditative.

"Some'ow she don't sound the sorf o' wife I'm looking for," he observed. "But p'r'aps if you was to tell me about them 'opes she's got—"

Mr. Baxter shook his head resolutely, albeit a trifle blankly.

"Got some money coming to 'er by will?" Mr. Turnbull suggested. "Something like that?"

Mr. Baxter drew in his breath sharply.

"O'wever—'owever did you guess that?" he asked.

Mr. Turnbull sagaciously tapped his temple with his forefinger.

"Well, since you're determined to 'ave the truth," the cook said, "she 'as got money coming to 'er by will."

"'Ow much?" Mr. Turnbull inquired, with interest.

"'Ow much would you think?" Mr. Baxter returned, guardedly.

"Fifty quid?" Mr. Turnbull hazarded.

The cook laughed contemptuously at the meagerness of his companion's estimate.

"More like two 'undred and fifty!"

"Ah, now that is keppitle, that is!" Mr. Turnbull stated. "'Oo's leaving it to 'er?"

"Oh, I don't know as I ought to go so far as to tell you that!" Mr. Baxter slowly demurred.

"As a friend, Li'nel!" Mr. Turnbull pleaded, winningly.

III

THE cook walked to the window and stared thoughtfully out at the roadway for a time. Then, with a little nod of self-congratulation, he swung round again and addressed Mr. Turnbull.

"Remember me saying, just now, as she used to be a gen'ral servant?" he reminded his companion. "Well, years ago she 'ad a place in London with a rich old lady, name o' Lockwood. Miss Lockwood. And Miss Lockwood give 'er solemn word and promise as she'd leave my aunt a couple o' 'undred or so, when she died."

"When 'oo died?" Mr. Turnbull asked, rather obtusely.

"Why, when Miss Lockwood died, o' course."

"But the old geezer might go on living a long time yet," Mr. Turnbull contended, somewhat callously. "And even then she might go and forget all about 'er promise to your aunt."

"She never give the promise to my aunt. My aunt don't know a word about it. It's quite by chance I 'eard of it. A secret, it was."

"Well, we all knows you're good at finding out secrets, Li'nel," Mr. Turnbull said. "'Ow did you find out about this one?"

"From the very lawyer as drew up Miss Lockwood's will for 'er!" Mr. Baxter asserted, triumphantly. "Just after my aunt first come to us, I 'appened quite by chance to go to 'im on another matter in London, and as soon as that lawyer 'eard my 'ome address, 'e pricks up 'is ears. 'What a coin-ci-dence!' he says. 'I made a note o' that very address only yesterday. I got it from a client o' mine, a Miss Lockwood. Do you know 'er?'"

Mr. Baxter paused to glance at Mr. Turnbull. That gentleman's hard breathing evidenced his close interest in the cook's narrative.

"I know the name," I says," Mr. Baxter continued. "'My aunt's only left a Miss Lockwood's service a week or so. And she wrote to 'er only three days ago, asking to 'ave 'er humbrella sent on to 'er,

what she'd left be'ind.' 'I know,' 'e says, 'that's 'ow Miss Lockwood got the address which she give me. And if your aunt is Miss Martha Gosling—' 'e says, and smiles very kind and congratulating at me."

"And then 'e told you about the legacy?" Mr. Turnbull surmised.

"Not all at once. It took a bit of getting out. But in the end I learned all there was to know, except the exact amount. And the lawyer chap told me as the will was so worded as Miss Lockwood would never be able to alter it again, not even if she wanted to. So there you are!"

"I bet your aunt wasn't 'alf pleased when she 'eard about it," Mr. Turnbull opined.

"But she ain't 'eard about it! She don't know a thing about it! The lawyer chap particularly warned me against that. 'E said that 'er getting to know about it is the only thing what might upset the will."

"But—"

"Don't hask me to explain it," Mr. Baxter begged, "because I can't! 'E made it all very clear to me at the time, but as for remembering what 'e said—all legal and mixed up, like, you know, with bits of Latin 'ere and there. But I ain't never told my aunt, and I do 'ope," he ended, earnestly, "as you won't so much as mention it to 'er and make 'er risk losing it after all."

"Well, of course, if that's the case, I shouldn't say nothing," Mr. Turnbull agreed. "But—but—"

He lapsed into silence, and scratched dubiously awhile at his grizzled locks.

"Tell you what," the cook said, "you come along 'ome with me and 'ave a look at 'er, and if she ain't just the sort for you, what with 'er two 'undred odd pounds to come and—"

"I'm going to be careful about this," Mr. Turnbull frankly announced. "Two 'undred quid is a nice little sum, and I shouldn't like to lose it, but—"

He shook his head.

"Well, I've met you before, cookie," he remarked. "If only there was a bit of solid hevidence you could show me, I'd be much 'appier."

"Be reasonable, Joe," Mr. Baxter urged. "'Ow can I show you what don't hexist?"

"That's just about what I mean."

Mr. Baxter frowned offensively.

"All the same, I'll come along and 'ave a look at 'er," Mr. Turnbull promised magnanimously.

IV

IN something of a preoccupied way, Mr. Baxter conducted his friend from the hostel and toward the abiding place of Miss Martha Gosling. View of a smart young ship's steward across the highway stirred Mr. Baxter's visage to a sudden, straining animation in voice and gesture.

"Well, well, what a forgetful chap I am!" he declared, coming to a standstill. "What's the good o' taking you along 'ome to see my aunt when she 'appens to be out all day to-day? I've only just remembered it! Tell you what, though—you come along to-morrow afternoon, and I'll see she's at 'ome to meet you. Drop along to tea, and we'll 'ave some cards and what-not after, eh?"

With this proposition, Mr. Turnbull readily agreed, and a few moments later the two shipmates parted. Mr. Baxter, waiting until Mr. Turnbull's solidity had vanished down a side street, set off in pursuit of the smart young steward and hailed him woefully.

The smart young steward shifted a suit case from one hand to the other, and bestowed a kindly but slightly patronizing attention on the somewhat breathless cook of the Vivid.

"Ted, my boy," Mr. Baxter said, "I got a lark for you. Soon as ever I see you just now, I thinks to meself: 'There's Ted Carter, and 'e's just the boy to enj'y a lark, and 'e'll 'elp you.'"

"What's it worth to me?" Mr. Carter promptly asked.

"Five bob."

"Must be a good bit you want done if you're offering five bob," Mr. Carter candidly commented.

"Not such a lot, Ted," the cook returned. "I only wants you to write a letter for me and post it in London, so as it 'll get 'ere by the last post to-morrow evening."

"It could get 'ere by the first post to-morrow," Mr. Carter remarked. "I'm catching the next train up, and—"

"But I don't want it to get 'ere till to-morrow evening; I wants 'im to see it arrive with 'is own eyes."

"Want who to?"

"Old Joe Turnbull, a shipmate o' mine."

"And what have I got to say in the letter?"

"Ah, it's got to be a very nice, hartistic letter, and nicely wrote and spelt, and I knows you're just the very chap for the job, Teddy, old man," Mr. Baxter fawned. "It's got to be a letter pretending to come from a solicitor and—"

"But, come in 'ere," he invited, hospitably, indicating the portals of an inn, "and I'll hexplain the 'ole thing to you."

Mr. Carter gracefully consulted the watch on his wrist.

"Right you are," he agreed. "I've got plenty of time to spare. I'll let you stand me two!"

V

Nor without a certain wariness did Mr. Joseph Turnbull present himself at Mr. Lionel Baxter's residence on the following afternoon. Accepting his friend's introduction to Mrs. Baxter and Miss Martha Gosling, Mr. Turnbull lowered his avoirdupois into an armchair, and thereafter, for a considerable space, held, as it were, a watching brief for himself.

That Miss Gosling was not altogether ignorant of the purpose underlying Mr. Turnbull's visit was self-evident. A skittishness that did not completely harmonize with her features marked her deportment, and more than once her complexion deepened under the unrelaxing scrutiny of Mr. Turnbull.

It was only with the advent of tea and a host of lesser Baxters, clamorous for the meal, that Mr. Baxter found opportunity to whisper an inquiry to his shipmate.

"I've seen worse," Mr. Turnbull guardedly replied, from behind the shelter of his open palm. "I don't know as she wouldn't suit me all right, if only I could be sure that—"

Mr. Baxter light-heartedly danced his way out to his wife in the little scullery.

"E's as good as 'ooked!" he joyously proclaimed. "We're going to get rid o' Aunt Martha at last!"

Mrs. Baxter permitted herself a soft but fervent two words of pious gratitude.

"You and aunt never did get on together," she remarked. "Let alone us wanting her room for the children, now they're growing. And the little she pays ain't any profit to us, not really. A happy ending, that's what I call it, if it really does come off."

"You wait till that there letter arrives," Mr. Baxter chuckled. "That 'll just about drive the last nail 'ome with a bang, you see if it don't!"

"I think you ought to have warned Aunt Martha that it was coming, though," Mrs. Baxter said. "Suppose she goes and gets uppish ideas, when she fancies she's coming into money? And suppose she starts looking down on Mr. Turnbull and won't have him?"

"She won't do that," Mr. Baxter foretold, confidently. "She ain't going to miss a chance of marrying and settling down. And if I'd told 'er about the letter before 'and, very likely she'd 'ave gone and overdone it and acted too much. Whereas now 'e'll be able to see 'ow really surprised she is at the noos, and that 'll 'ook 'im all the tighter."

As soon as tea was over, Mrs. Baxter, in obedience to a jerk of her husband's head, cleared the room of their offspring and set the larger of them to the task of washing up the crockery.

"And now for a game of whist," Mr. Baxter ordained. "What about you taking Aunt Martha for a partner, eh, Joe?" he asked, roguishly.

Miss Gosling tittered in maidenly confusion, and Mr. Turnbull greeted the double meaning of "partner" with a shallow, uncompromising grin. Together, the two ladies and the two gentlemen congregated themselves about the table.

Scarcely had the cards been dealt for the first time, however, when Mr. Baxter claimed attention.

"Some one coming up to our front door," he remarked. "Can't you 'ear 'em?"

"Wonder who it can be?" Mrs. Baxter hazarded, artlessly. "Surely it couldn't be the—"

There came a sharp double knock at the door.

"It is the postman!" Mrs. Baxter finished, and hastened out into the passage.

"Well, I wasn't hexpecting any letters," Mr. Baxter observed. "I wonder 'oo—"

Mrs. Baxter reappeared, a letter in her hand.

"It's for you, Aunt Martha," she announced, and examined the envelope. "It's a London postmark, and I don't know the writing, either."

"Hadvertisement, I expect," Mr. Baxter put in, filling his pipe unconcernedly.

Miss Gosling took the missive, shook her head at the unfamiliarity of the handwriting, and, uttering a request that paid tribute to etiquette, slit open the envelope. Her first glance was for the signature, and again she shook her head.

"Jonathan Dawson?" she murmured. "I'm sure I don't know any Jonathan Dawson."

"Oh, well, it can't be anything very important," she added. "I'll read it later on, when I've got more time. We're all waiting to play cards now."

"It—it might want a hanswer," Mr. Baxter urged. "Better just make sure."

Miss Gosling, straightening out the missive, began to read.

"Oh, my goodness!" she exclaimed, suddenly.

"Anything wrong?" Mr. Baxter asked.

She shook her head and gestured to him to refrain from interrupting her attention to the letter.

"Oh, my goodness!" she exclaimed, again.

Twice she read the letter through, and then she set it down, and picked it up again at once and reperused it.

"Looks as if you was interested," Mr. Baxter commented. "What's it all about?"

"You—you've heard me talk of Miss Lockwood, what I used to be in service to, years ago?" she demanded.

"'Eard you mention 'er 'undreds of times," Mr. Baxter averred. "What about 'er?"

"She's dead!"

Mr. Baxter and Mr. Turnbull exchanged glances.

"Oh, so she's dead, is she?" Mr. Baxter said, casually.

"Yes, and she's left me two hundred and fifty pounds in her will!"

Mrs. Baxter very successfully simulated a squeal of amazement. Mr. Baxter nudged Mr. Turnbull. Mr. Turnbull sat staring at Miss Gosling as if he were now really seeing her clearly for the first time.

"This Mr. Jonathan Dawson is her solicitor," Miss Gosling offered, tapping the letter. "And he writes to say that in her will Miss Lockwood left me two hundred and fifty pounds. 'Her faithful servant,' she called me, it seems. Well, I always did think she was a bit queer. I wasn't with her six months, and we was always having rows. And to think, after all these years, she's left me—"

"And when do you get it?" Mr. Baxter inquired.

"Well, he says I'm to receive it as soon as possible, but, owing to the estate being rather large, it may not be for a few weeks. Oh, well, I shan't mind waiting."

"We must all do our best to make the time pass pleasant to you, ma'am," Mr. Turnbull said, very prettily.

And when, at the end of the evening, he left Mr. Baxter's house, he privately addressed his shipmate.

"What about me coming round again to-morrow night?" he suggested. "Between you and me, as man to man, I don't want 'er to start picking and choosing. The sooner it's settled, the 'appier I shall be."

"Same 'ere, Joe, old man," Mr. Baxter declared, with great cordiality.

VI

Six days later, the Vivid sailed again, but now Mr. Joseph Turnbull, by arrangement with his captain, was no longer of her personnel.

But with Miss Gosling on his arm, he went down to the quay to witness the departure of the vessel and to take leave of Mr. Baxter.

"Well, good v'yage to you, Li'nel," he said, when the moment of parting was imminent. "And I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure."

"Don't mention it," Mr. Baxter begged, smiling into the horizon.

"You'll find us quite old married folks by the time you next comes back, Li'nel," Mr. Turnbull said, fondly patting his fair companion's arm. "And there'll be the little shop all a-flourishing with us two behind the counter. And it won't be such a little shop, neither, thanks to the bit I've saved, and Miss Gosling's seventy pounds."

"Seventy pounds?" Mr. Baxter questioned, sharply.

"Oh, yes, I wanted to tell you about that, Lionel," Miss Gosling said. "You know how you've always been going on at me to get better pay. Well, I've got a bit of a confession to make. I've always been paid much higher than I told you, and—"

"Well, then, why did you—"

"You know what you are, Lionel," she remarked. "You've always been a one for borrowing, and if you'd guessed I'd got any money— But we won't quarrel about that now. Anyway, I've been saving up and saving up for years, unbeknown to

you, and I got together seventy pounds in the end. And, what's more, I always meant to leave it to my niece and you in the end, but Mr. Turnbull, here, came along and—"

"Come along?" Mr. Baxter echoed fiercely. "Why, I brought him! I was mug enough to—"

"Now don't go talking wild, Lionel," she requested him. "As it happens, you're going to do even better than I'd planned. Although you didn't know it, I had to dis-appoint you of seventy pounds, but I'm

going to make it up to you, and Mr. Turnbull very generously agrees. As soon as ever I get that two hundred and fifty pounds, I'm going to give a hundred of it to you! *Now* what do you say?"

But Mr. Baxter, unable to find words that should adequately express his feelings, merely stared with hard, unblinking eyes upon Miss Gosling.

Then, finding the whole situation beyond him, he gestured feebly, and, shaking his head, tottered up the gangplank to his galley.

Arms and the Man-Hater

THE STORY OF A GIRL WHOSE SUITORS TESTED VARIOUS
THEORIES OF FEMININE PSYCHOLOGY, WITH RESULTS
THAT DID NOT WHOLLY CONFORM TO THE
EXPECTATIONS OF THE THEORISTS

By Charles Divine

TOM RENWICK had taken a lot of punishment in his life, mostly from men. For example, there was the time when he first came East in charge of a shipment of cattle, and had a two days' fight before he finished the trip.

The fight started in the caboose, just outside Chicago, where the purchasing company's belligerent representative had met the train to take over the cattle and go with them to the end of the run in Buffalo. The Buffalo man went a little too far in his bullying, browbeating tactics, and the consequence was that Tom found himself being slammed around the caboose—and slamming back—hour after hour, while the train ran on across Indiana and Ohio. At Cleveland the fight ended, Tom's opponent being carried from the train by the crew; and at Buffalo, with the cattle safely delivered to the purchasers, Tom himself collapsed.

When he came to in a hospital, he had his first experience with women. The nurse who attended him through those two long weeks was a ministering angel. Tom be-

gan to think that all women, if given a fair chance, might be like that nurse; but that was before he met Doris Leighton and fell in love with her. That changed everything for him.

Living now in New York, having given up cow-punching to draw pictures of Western life, Tom had an apartment with Dick Wessel, who worked for a publishing house that used many of Tom's illustrations in their books, and who introduced him to a new social life. Dick was an amiable, easy-going young man of twenty-six, a foot shorter than Tom in height, but several inches taller in cosmopolitan experience.

"You're cuckoo," Dick told him one evening at a large party where Doris Leighton was present, making Tom miserable by her disdain of him.

"If I could only grab her the way you do a steer," said Tom, "I'd *make* her listen to me!"

"You're cuckoo," repeated Dick, looking up at him. "You're as cuckoo as a store full of Swiss clocks at midnight!"

At that, in the corner where they stood

alone, Tom grabbed Dick, instead of Doris. His strong hands pinioned his friend's arms until Dick's little round face screwed up in a spasm of pain.

"Lemme go," begged Dick, "or you'll ruin a good publisher!"

Tom dropped his hands and stared over Dick's shoulder at the scene at the other end of the Wainwrights' long drawing-room—a scene dominated, as far as Tom was concerned, by the figure of Doris, tall, superbly slender, and shockingly beautiful. Her black hair was so lustrous that he could have used it for a mirror.

"Forget her," advised Dick, rubbing his arm.

"Forget her?" echoed Tom in his slow, drawling voice. "Can a man forget his first sight of the Grand Cañon?"

"She's deeper than that," returned Dick, noting the taut expression on his friend's lean, handsome face.

"Or a statue of a Greek goddess, or the beauty of the stars over the Arizona desert—or—or—"

"Listen!" cut in Dick, expostulating. "This has gone far enough. You're my best friend, Tom, and I'm going to talk frankly to you, do you hear, even if you bust me all up afterward."

Tom acquiesced with a nod of his dark head.

"A-a-a-a-ll right, brother. Go ahead! Shoot!"

"Well, you're just a simple fellow from the West. You've got a clever hand when it comes to ink and brush, and you're going to make a name for yourself as an illustrator of a passing phase of American civilization; but, all the same, you're just a simple fellow from the West—from out where men are men, as they say, and women are closed books—the kind like Doris. You're my best friend, and I don't want to see you fall into the Grand Cañon of sophistication. The Greek goddess stuff is all right, and Doris looks like one; but, as for the beauty of the stars—well, whether they're over the Arizona desert or the Broadway Sahara, Doris is just as cold as they are—"

"I don't believe it!"

"And twice as inaccessible."

"I don't believe it!" repeated Tom, doggedly, earnestly.

"But I've known her a couple of years," protested Dick, struggling hard to keep from being exasperated.

"I don't believe she's cold—not toward the right man."

"Oh, so you're the right man, are you? Ha, ha! That's what they all think."

Tom disregarded his friend's sarcasm. His blue eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"I don't get some of you folks here in the East," he said, so naively that it struck his friend as almost pathetic. "I just don't get you."

"What don't you get?"

"I don't see why nobody has married Doris."

"Well, they've asked her, the same as you have, but they got the same answer."

"But I don't see why somebody hasn't just carried her off."

"All right, *Lochinvar*! She must have been waiting for you."

Dick turned away toward the sandwich table.

Tom straightened his dinner coat about his solid shoulders, gave his collar a hitch, and strode across the room to Doris's side. He waited patiently until the shifting movement of people, and a sudden descent to the basement dining room, where there was dancing, gave him a chance to speak to her alone again. She sat, one knee crossed over the other under the smooth satin of her gown, and gazed up at him coolly.

"I dislike these so-called 'gorgeous men,'" she told him. He had been described by Mrs. Wainwright as belonging distinctly in that class. "They seem to think they have to have a line. I abominate men with lines!"

"But I have no line," protested Tom eagerly, noting the dark gloss on Doris's hair, pulled back from her ample white brow. "I only say what I feel."

"How ingenuous!" Doris shrugged her shoulders. "I dislike all men, no matter what they say."

Tom's jaw set.

"But you know I love you, Doris, more than—"

Her voice cut through his slow drawl, regardless of its tenseness.

"I loathe men who talk of love."

"You can't," objected Tom, "and be human."

"Who says I'm human?"

"I do. You're not a man-hater. You're too lovely for that. I know we were meant for each other, when you get down to facts."

"I can get along without men. I should

hate to feel that they were necessary to me. I want to be self-sufficient. Don't you see?" She gave him a level glance. "Complete independence!"

"But I'd never interfere with your work."

"Thanks!" she said dryly. Then she smiled at him as she would at a wayward child, and began to explain soberly: "You have your pictures, your drawings. That's creative art—the same instinct that less clever people have to take out in love. Well, I have mine—miniatures. I love doing them. That's creative, too, and it's enough for me."

"How do you mean, enough?"

Doris went on to enlarge on her ideas, and Tom remained to listen attentively until the crowd drifted back and Doris was drawn into a circle of general conversation. Then he turned away to look for Dick Wessel, and found him downstairs in the dining room, gazing out through the French windows into the garden at the back.

Tom shook him by the shoulder, demanding firmly:

"Dick, what does Doris mean by 'sublimating her emotions'?"

"Oh, *that!*" replied Dick. "That's just psychological jargon. It means taking it out on something else."

"Taking *what* out?"

"Love—emotion."

"Doris says I ought to 'sublimate,'" Tom squinted his eyes, perplexed. "Now that's a hell of a word to spring on a cow-puncher, isn't it?"

"I agree with you. It's cruelty to animals, that's a fact."

"Can you explain just what it means? I want to get this straight, if it's the last thing I do!"

"Well, Tom," Dick assured him, expansively, "you've come to the right source. I'll tell you exactly what Doris means. First, we'll grant, for the sake of argument, that there is in most of us an instinct for love."

"There's no argument on that."

"Wait a minute! Usually we satisfy that instinct by falling in love with a person, just as you have with Doris; but some people satisfy it in other ways. They love a thing instead of a person—an institution, their work, their art, maybe only some hobby like building ship models, or—or—did you ever collect postage stamps?"

"Say, brother, I was lucky if I got one letter in six months out in Arizona!"

"Well, it takes all kinds of people to make a world. You can quote me as saying that, if you ever want to. You probably never will. Well, some people have so much love in their system that they have to use part of its force somewhere else. When you use it on some other thing, such as art or literature—as a sort of safety valve—you do what Doris and some of the other advanced thinkers call 'sublimating' their emotions."

"Thank God, I'm not advanced!"

"You work it off in other pursuits—see?"

"But what's sublime about that?"

"Search me!"

"Besides, I don't want to sublimate what I feel for Doris. It's sublime enough. It's too sacred to waste on hobbies; but she won't believe me. She says she hates all men. Do you believe that?"

"No. Take it from me, who knows psychology from top to bottom."

"Then, for the love of Mike," Tom begged desperately, "help me out!" He took Dick by the arm. "Come out in the garden. There'll be a gang down here dancing again in a minute."

In the garden they paced along a brick-paved walk as far as the back fence, and unexpectedly scared away a couple who had been sitting on a bench in the opposite corner. The night was mild enough for dance-heated couples to linger here a moment without feeling a chill.

The two men lighted cigarettes. Tom started to speak again, but was checked by Dick.

"Wait a minute! Let me think." During the pause he noticed Tom's anxious eyes hovering over him. "I believe you were right, after all, in wondering why nobody has ever carried Doris off. I think we've all been afraid to try that with her. Yes, I've got it!" he announced decisively. "Here's the way I dope it out. Doris is a girl who is—"

"Alive and warm-blooded," interrupted Tom, "only she won't admit it."

"Wait a minute, I said! You know horses and men, Tom, and how to handle a steak over a fire, but Doris Leighton is a psychological problem, and that, as I said, is right up my street."

"Go ahead, then."

"Doris has managed to hold men at a

distance. She's indifferent to them. She says she hates them. That's sex antagonism, which often is only love disguised, as I would describe it if I were writing a textbook; but I'm not dashing off any books this week. All that antagonism to men, all that pose—for that's all it amounts to, I think—it's only on the surface—"

"Just what I've been trying to tell you!"

"All that would vanish before the right attack. You've got to take Doris by storm. Don't try any more arguments on her. Use the strong arm."

"You mean grab her?"

Tom stood still, looking up at the lighted windows above him.

"Sure! Grab her and kiss her. The dominant male—that kind of stuff. Get her out here in the garden, and when everybody else is upstairs or in the basement, dancing, show her some primitive wooing, and don't take her ultracivilized 'no' for an answer."

Tom peered at Dick sharply, considering the proposition.

"You mean it?"

"Absolutely. Those are the tactics for you. The more I think of it, the better I like the idea."

"Maybe you're right. Actions speak louder than words."

"Of course they do. Well, will you try it or not?"

Tom hesitated a moment.

"You don't think I'd be making a mistake, do you?"

"I think you're making a mistake in letting her walk all over you, the way she does."

That decided him.

"I'll do it, Dick!" he said.

"Good! I'll put a record on the phonograph and keep the basement crowd occupied while you're out in the garden with Doris." Dick looked up at Tom with a smile. "Greater love hath no man than this—that he will lay down his life and let a girl walk off with his bachelor roommate!"

II

WATCHING near the basement door, Dick saw Tom and Doris walk into the garden and disappear into its shadows at the far end. He waited expectantly. To save Tom from interruption he had to dance with Mrs. Clyde Sitterley, who wanted to

walk into the garden. She weighed two hundred pounds.

As soon as the music ceased, Dick peered through the window again. All he could see was that their two figures were close together, and then one of them suddenly detached itself and came toward the window. It was Tom, holding one hand over his eye.

"What happened?" demanded Dick.

"I did what you told me to, you shrimp," said Tom, angrily, "and she soaked me in the eye!"

"Doris hit you?"

"She *did*," he affirmed, and showed Dick his red eye.

Their voices drew a couple of others to the window; and a moment later, when Doris reëntered, her dark eyes blazing, and began to berate Tom in a politely civilized but cutting tone, a small crowd gathered around.

"Tom Renwick, you're the crudest person I ever knew!" she said impulsively, and went on to remark scornfully that men who came from the great open spaces often had too much of that quality where their mental faculties ought to be.

"Come on, Doris!" urged Dick Wessel, speaking up in Tom's behalf. "Don't take it so seriously. Tom meant no disrespect, of course. We all know how he feels toward you."

"Keep out of this, Dick!" retorted Doris, and turned a withering glance on Tom.

In the crowd looking on was Caldwell Drake, a cynical, debonair man about town, and frequenter of night clubs, who had taken many slaps in the face in his life, but never one like this—not even from that show girl, Fanny Lathrop, who won a breach of promise verdict against him. Also in the group was Herbert Emens, leaning decoratively against the mantelpiece, who seemed to be the only one enjoying Tom's discomfiture; for Doris's definite elimination of Tom Renwick advanced his own chances, he thought.

Dick Wessel looked at Tom, observing his flushed face and tightly compressed lips, and knew that he was trying to conceal the fact that Doris had aroused the fighting blood in him.

When, at length, Doris finished with Tom, after expressing her opinion of men who "tried to paw you all over," she turned away, and the group disintegrated. Tom

lost no time in leading Dick grimly up to the hall, to get their hats. They were going home, Dick concluded rightly.

In the street, Tom turned and addressed him.

"I've a good mind to knock a lung out of you!"

"I'm sorry, Tom."

"I'm through with taking *your* advice!"

"Well, I meant well."

Tom muttered something under his breath and started walking away.

"I made a damned fool of myself. No more garden variety of psychology for me!"

III

THE next time Tom touched upon the subject, he remarked that psychology might be up Dick's street, but he didn't live there any more.

"After this, I'll follow my own advice; and I've got a good hunch right now."

"What is it, Tom?"

"I won't tell you. You might try to advise me again."

After awhile, however, Tom relented.

"Doris treats men the way she does because it pays," he said. "Being cold is effective. She flouts them, and they only flock around her the more."

"Sure! It's a technique that—"

"Shut up! If the men didn't come back for more, she'd get over being so cold."

"Think so?" ventured Dick.

"I'm going to prove it."

"When?"

"At the next party we're at."

"How?"

"Never you mind, professor! You'll see when it happens." Tom let out an eloquent groan. "My God, but didn't she give me a razzing!"

Dick had no idea of the steps Tom planned to take until several nights later, when the Brakeleys, by expert use of the telephone, summoned a crowd to their big Madison Avenue apartment. It was the same crowd that had gone to the Wainwrights, and Tom insisted that he and Dick should arrive early, before Doris Leighton appeared. As soon as they got there, Tom began to put his plan into effect. He informed all the men that he didn't want any of them to go near Doris the whole evening.

"I want her to see what indifference is like," he said. "I want her to taste some of her own medicine."

"Not a bad idea!" Caldwell Drake laughed approvingly. He, like most of the others, had suffered from Doris's supercilious attitude. Furthermore, he felt sorry for Tom. "I'd be glad to see somebody get the best of her," confessed Caldwell. "I wouldn't do it myself, but I don't mind some one else doing it."

"I'll give her the coldest shoulder she ever saw," promised Dick Wessel. "Count on me."

The other men said that Tom could count on them, too—all except Herbert Emens, who made no comment.

"That's fine!" said Tom. "I thought at first that somebody might object to my little scheme, and then I'd have to throw him downstairs."

Herbert Emens spoke up.

"Well, I object," he said, with his mannered air. "I shall talk to Miss Leighton when and where I like."

Tom stared at him a moment.

"Are you in your right mind?"

"I refuse to be told how I must act toward a lady."

Tom stepped closer to him.

"Then you'll be the first man I'll have to throw downstairs!"

Without further comment, he took Herbert ungently by the neck and the seat of his English-cut trousers, which provided sufficient handhold, and deposited him some distance outside the door in the hall. He threw his hat and coat after him.

Herbert did not come back. He was seen limping off up the street. The spectacle would have added weight to Tom's moral suasion, if any had been needed.

When Doris arrived, suavely clad in a ravishing gown of blue silk, her supple shoulders gleaming under jeweled straps, she found herself entering the scene of the party without attracting the slightest attention from the men present. They were all engrossed in talking to others, to this girl and that, or in conversational twos and threes of such interest that they seemed wholly oblivious of Doris.

She dropped into a chair and waited; but not a man came near her. Mrs. Brakeley, the hostess, gave her a warm word of welcome, and then hurried off to attend to other duties.

One knee crossed over the other, Doris

swung her foot in the air impatiently. She wasn't used to this. Finally she called to Caldwell Drake as he passed by:

"Hello, Caldwell! Sit down a moment. I want to talk to you."

"Sorry, Doris," he answered, hurrying past. "Can't do it now—got to talk to a new red-headed girl in the next room."

Furthermore, Caldwell didn't return. Doris called to others, but all the men seemed to be intent on other women. At length she tried to join one of the groups, but at her approach it slowly dissolved, the men excusing themselves and moving elsewhere.

From annoyance, the look on Doris's face changed to one of anxiety. Wherever she moved, she found the men occupied with other women, and the women unwilling to relinquish their chances. Too often they had been wallflowers themselves on account of Doris's attraction for the men. A number of girls found themselves apparently more popular than they had ever been before; and the man with whom all, both men and women, seemed to enjoy talking the most was Tom Renwick.

When the party broke up, Caldwell Drake reminded everybody that he was giving a party a week from that night.

"You'll come too, Doris, won't you?" he asked. "It'll be another pleasant party like to-night's, I hope."

"Ye-e-s," she assented doubtfully.

IV

At Caldwell's party Doris met with the same treatment during its early hours. She felt stunned and hurt, and finally sought out Dick Wessel and demanded:

"What's the matter? You've simply got to tell me! I know there's something wrong. What have I done that everybody should shun me?" Her lip began to tremble, and for the first time Dick saw her losing her perfect and beautiful poise. "Was it because of what happened between Tom Renwick and me?"

"Well—" Dick hesitated, not having been instructed by Tom what he should say in such a contingency. "Tom is one in a thousand," he said.

"But *was* it because of that? Tell me. Please!"

"Let your conscience be your guide," replied Dick, and left her with that to ponder over.

It was a little later that Herbert Emens

unexpectedly arrived at the party, and, avoiding Tom, lost no time in telling Doris the reason for her strange ostracism. At first she was furious when she faced Tom, with some of the others standing behind him, laughing, rallying her. Then, biting her lip, she made an effort to pass it off with the best grace she could. After all, the joke was on her.

"I was testing a theory of mine," explained Tom, with less of triumph in his manner than he might have assumed, out of consideration for Doris.

She began to see certain events in a new light. The way the men had lined up solidly behind Tom made her realize that perhaps, after all, she had been unfair to him.

"Very well!" she said. "I apologize for some of the things I said to you at the Wainwrights'. Oh, you needn't laugh, you others. My views in general haven't altered a bit."

"Do you still believe that to be successful a woman shouldn't get married?" asked Dick Wessel.

"Yes—what about it, Doris?" added Mrs. Brakeley.

"Well," replied Doris, considering, "I'll admit that a woman might well marry a man, because of certain protective advantages it would bring her—but not a man with whom she's in love. On the contrary, she should marry a man with whom she's decidedly *not* in love. I don't want love cluttering up things, getting between me and my work, and shutting off my clear view of life."

"But would it?" Tom Renwick ventured to ask.

"Of course! When your feelings are involved, your emotions engaged, you might just as well be blind."

Tom listened with a half smile, while Caldwell Drake had an unusually grave and thoughtful look on his face for one who was supposed to be a care-free man about town, untroubled by questions of marriage.

"What are you so solemn about, Caldwell?" demanded Tom. "You don't think Doris is right, do you?"

Caldwell straightened his shoulders, as if shaking himself awake from a very deep abstraction.

"I was thinking of it from the man's point of view."

"You would," commented Doris, laughing softly.

"Well, I don't often think at all, Doris, so you ought to be glad to discover such hidden depths in me." He smiled at her conciliatingly. "I'm inclined to favor your idea. I see something in it."

When alone with Doris for a moment, Tom asked eagerly:

"You say you might marry a man you didn't love?"

"Yes," she admitted, with a challenging expression in her dark eyes.

"Then that fits my case. Marry me!"

"Oh, but you're in love with me, so you say—or said."

"Yes—I still am."

"That spoils it all. I would only marry a man who was just a friend."

When Tom, shaking his head, perplexed, joined Dick Wessel for a cigarette, Dick told him:

"Don't worry! Doris doesn't mean half she says. She picked up those ideas about a year ago. I know exactly where—from John Sifton and his wife. The Siftons are always leaving crazy ideas lying around loose."

"Don't you think Doris is in earnest?"

"She thinks she is, but psychologically she is—"

"No, thanks!" Tom backed away with a gesture of refusal. "No more of that word from you, please! Come on—the party's breaking up. Let's take Doris home, and then lope back to our own place."

"Why drag me along?"

"I don't mind you, Dick. I don't know you're there."

"Thanks!"

"Oh, you're all right, brother. Don't get on your high horse. It's really a tribute. You're the kind of a fellow a man can leave waiting outside on the sidewalk while he goes into the vestibule to bid his girl good night."

Tom didn't keep Dick waiting on the sidewalk that night for more than a few moments.

"Women are funny," he said on the way home.

"A profound observation!" commented Dick.

V

THE Wainwrights had a summer place at Patchogue, Long Island—a rambling house big enough to put up a dozen friends

over the week-end. It was there, in August, that Doris, Tom, Caldwell, and several others met on an eventful occasion—eventful chiefly for Doris, Tom, and Caldwell. Caldwell had his talk with her first, late on Saturday night, alone, in the Wainwrights' library.

"I've been thinking over what you said about marriage at the Brakeleys," he said, leaning toward her seriously. "I've been thinking about it ever since then, Doris, and what I now propose to you is marriage on your own terms."

"My own terms!" she echoed, surprised, struck by his earnestness.

"Yes; but first let me outline a few things to you. I'm pretty well off, Doris, and the woman who marries me can have all she wants—short of riotous extravagance, of course. She can go anywhere she pleases. She can travel all over Europe. You want to travel, I know."

"But what makes you think I'd marry you, Caldwell?"

"Mutual convenience."

"Convenience?" Doris's brows knitted.

"Yes. You know I've got into a couple of messes through breach of promise suits. Well, as long as I'm unmarried, I'll be in danger from that sort of thing, life being what it is—and I being what I am." Doris gave him an astonished look, but he went on: "Married, I'd be safe. You said at the Brakeleys, Doris, that you wanted a marriage without love—just a friend. Well, that's what I offer you—an honest proposal on that basis."

Doris gasped. The astonishing thing about it was that Caldwell was intensely in earnest. Then the girl's cheeks flamed in a growing anger.

"An honest proposal, you call it?"

"Why not? It fits in with your views. I won't interfere with your work—or anything. You can go where you please. You can have your affairs, love and otherwise, and I'll have mine."

Doris's hands were clutching the sides of her chair tightly, while anger blazed in her eyes. What Caldwell proposed was disgusting! She had a feeling of humiliation that she should have laid herself open to such a proposal. The realization that her own attitude had been responsible for this gave her mind a sudden jolt. She felt as if in her mental machinery a cog had slipped into place, and something clicked.

The next moment she had leaped to her feet with a withering glance at him.

"Caldwell," she said, "you're a beast!"

She strode from the room, with two very red spots in her cheeks, and went straight upstairs to bed. She spent a sleepless, restless night, thinking of what Caldwell had said, and of all its implications.

When she came downstairs in the morning, she found only two others up ahead of her—Tom Renwick and Dick Wessel, preparing for an early game of tennis. Tom was already out on the court, putting up the net, while Dick was fumbling around in the hall chest for a racket that suited him.

"What's the matter, Doris?" inquired Dick. "You look quite a little upset this morning."

"I am," she confessed, to his surprise. "Something Caldwell said to me last night. It—it was insulting."

He stared at her.

"Why, you must have misunderstood him. Caldwell wouldn't do that."

"I understood him all right. It—it—"

Her voice failed her. Suddenly she amazed Dick by putting her hands on his shoulders and resting her head upon them.

"Doris!" he exclaimed. "Are you actually crying?"

"Y-yes!" she sobbed. "I—I can't help it."

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, everything!"

She lifted her eyes, and Dick was touched by the sight of her wet lashes.

"Has it anything to do with Tom?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"No—er—yes—maybe."

"Then you oughtn't to be weeping on my shoulder." He gave her a comforting pat and pushed her gently into a chair. "Sit right there a minute," he said, and hurried outdoors.

On the tennis court he said to Tom:

"Go into the house. Doris is crying."

"What?"

"You heard me!"

Tom dropped his racket and raced to the porch.

Dick leaned against one of the net posts until he had smoked a whole cigarette. When at length he reentered the house unhurriedly, he found Doris in Tom's arms. She was making no protest about it. Instead, she was telling him softly how much she loved him—really, truly loved him—and had all the time, she guessed, deep down in her heart; only it took her a long while to come to her senses.

Dick halted in the doorway as they looked up.

"Don't mind me," he made haste to assure them, starting to back out. "I'm that kind of a fellow. I'll wait outside."

Doris blushed radiantly.

"He can come in, Tom, can't he?"

"Sure!" said Tom, elated. "Come in, stupid! We don't need psychology now."

THANKSGIVING

WITH no clanging of cymbals, no chiming of bells,
The strain of Thanksgiving exultantly swells;
Through forests of cedar and woodlands of birch,
From stately cathedral and countryside church,
Where saints have assembled, where wasters have trod,
The prayers of Thanksgiving are lifted to God.

With no flutter of pennants, no flags on the breeze,
The Thanksgiving praises float over the seas,
Through valley, o'er mountain, by river and lake,
Where poetry whispers, where sciences wake,
From sand-silvered beeches, from snow-covered sod,
The prayers of Thanksgiving are rising to God.

With no blazing of torches that redden the sky,
The Thanksgiving tribute is wafted on high;
From Northland and Southland, from East and from West,
Each soul pays its tribute and gives of its best.
From prince and from pauper, from sage and from clod,
The prayers of Thanksgiving are wafted to God.

L. Mitchell Thornton

"Come On, Dolores!"

EVEN THE INSIDERS HAVE TO GUESS WHEN PLACING THEIR BETS IN THE "SPORT OF KINGS"

By Hugh S. Fullerton

SUDDENLY aware of a presence beside him, Courtney turned, swiftly expectant, and his gaze met the laughter of a pair of violet eyes. A soft hand was upon his arm, and it pressed against his body as the eddying crowd of Broadway-ites milled instantly about the obstruction of these two stationary individuals in their swarming mass.

The carmine tint of an electric sign of so many thousand bulbs, a square away, and ten stories overhead, tinted the girl's cheek as if she had flushed with pleasure. But her smile persisted, even though a greenish glow shone again a moment later in the pink glow's place.

"Rita!" Courtney cried, in welcome and surprise. As he took her hand he wondered again, as he always did, at her freshness and piquancy which persisted in spite of—or perhaps because of—the sophistication of her ways.

"Busted," she announced with a light laugh.

"And I'm worse than that. I'm dull. Hungry?"

"Yes, very." She laughed lightly. "Buy me a dinner and I'll pay you back."

"A story?" Courtney asked. "You have one?"

"I don't know. Wait, and I'll remember one."

Courtney sighed in a mingling of relief and anticipation. A writer writes sometimes because he has to, but more often because he must. And when one must deliver a story to an editor, and there is no story to be delivered—why, Rita had saved the day before.

They made their way through the throng on the sidewalks. They became atoms, droplets in a human stream flowing theaterward, homeward, to a myriad des-

tinations, but all along the single way. With the others they swirled and eddied when suddenly dammed by the signal of a traffic officer.

Then his shrill whistle lifted the floodgates, and Rita and Courtney were swept into the maelstrom of the square, glaring with the lights of dazzling signboards, its thousands of honking automobiles crawling like giant beetles through gaps in the human waves.

They were swept almost past the destination Courtney had selected on the instant, but shouldered their way, a little flushed, a little laughing, and came suddenly into the Roman Garden. Music softer than that of other places came from a hidden orchestra beyond the bank of flowers. Men and women danced or dined.

For Courtney there was always a table, from which he might see and not be seen, for his business was to watch the tragedies and comedies of Broadway, and to write of them. Instead of watching, he sat back, partly turned to the dancing floor, so that Rita might see all who passed.

Twice they danced together. As she talked lightly across the table between dances, Rita's eyes watched the moving crowd. There was a lull.

"Well?" Courtney inquired.

"Not yet," she said.

II

WITH a sudden stir, a party of six entered the room, from which many of the diners were drifting by twos and fours as theater time approached. One of the three men was tall, handsome, with athletic figure, his forty years carried gracefully.

Following him was a dapper, half-mincing, overdressed, and overvaleted individual

whose every expression and move marked him as one of Broadway's "wise" men.

The third was stodgy, kewpie-stomached, bespectacled; the perfect type of that vast class New York knows as "Cloaks and Suits."

Two of the women were blond beyond credence, well garbed, and carrying the easy assurance of the successful gold digger. The other, more quietly dressed, handsome, brunette, her face a trifle hard, had the manner of one who wished she were out of it.

Rita, the laugh dying from her lips, watched the entrance of the sextet, and, reaching out her small hand, touched Courtney's arm.

"There," she declared in low tones, "is your story."

Courtney turned and glanced quickly at the party.

"The big man," she said, "is Bill Whitehouse, horse owner and sportsman, and liked by every one, for he's never been known to say 'No' to any one in want. You know his reputation, Mr. Courtney. He's as square as they make them, and I don't mind telling you that I love him. The little fellow is Newt Cox, his betting commissioner, who is called 'the Cincinnati Kid'."

Courtney nodded. He was familiar with their names. Every one who knew the race tracks, knew Bill Whitehouse and his shadow, the Kid. In the old days, when the bookmakers saw the Kid plunging through the "line," looking for the best odds, sometimes there was panic. It meant either a feast or a famine: a feast if the Kid lost; ruin, almost, when he won.

"I don't know the blonde with Whitehouse," said Rita. "The other is gold-digging the fat man. The dark-haired girl is new to the game. I never saw her before to-day."

Rita stopped talking, and sat staring at the smoke of her cigarette as she jabbed the lighted end nervously against the tray.

"What is it?" Courtney asked, surprised by her repressed emotion.

"Nothing," she answered, shrugging her shoulders to mean "Everything."

Her long lashed eyes were half closed as she lighted another cigarette, and inhaled slowly.

"Who is the cloak-and-suiter?" he asked.

Rita inhaled again, sat silent a moment,

and, leaning forward, talked in low tones, pretending indifference.

"The first time I ever saw him was last Decoration Day, at the Jamaica race track," she replied. "You know Decoration Day crowds, the once-in-awhiles in the stand, the regulars still cold to the game."

"Yes," he nodded, visualizing the scene, the lawn in front of the stands packed with squirming, pushing men, striving to reach the bookmakers to make a bet, and enjoy the double thrill of violating the law and backing a favorite.

"Bill had lost a good deal of money that day," she went on slowly. "He was irritable and nervous. The fifth race was about to be run, and Bill's horse, Dolores, was entered. She did not figure to have much of a chance to win, but Bill was in one of his stubborn streaks, forcing his luck, and, having lost on four races, was determined to back his own horse."

"Dolores was beaten. Bill was furious, and just then Fritz Maher came up. Fritz is in the tailoring business, and had made clothes for Bill, and the sight of the pudgy little tailor made Bill madder still. Fritz was about to speak to us when Bill snapped out:

"'Fritz, how much do I owe you?'"

"'About five hundred, I think, Mr. Whitehouse,' Fritz replied. 'No hurry; I wasn't thinking of it.'"

"'Well, I was,' Bill snarled. 'I'll tell you what I'll do: give me a receipt, and I'll hand you that damned horse.'"

"'She is worth a lot more, Mr. Whitehouse,' Fritz said. 'You keep her and pay me when she wins.'"

"'I don't give a damn what she's worth—take her away, and receipt that bill,' Bill insisted, losing his head. 'I never want to see her again.'"

"Fritz was surprised, and started to argue, but Bill insisted. So Fritz became a horse owner against his will. That was last Decoration Day."

III

SHE repeated the date, as if in deep thought.

"Well—what happened?" Courtney asked, after a silence. "I don't remember that the horse has done anything startling."

"That was the last I saw or knew of them until to-day," she continued, ignoring his question. "Fritz knew enough to know he didn't know much about racing. He

hired 'Soldier' Bell, an old-time colored trainer who was taking a string of horses to Saratoga. Soldier advised him not to race Dolores for a time, but to give the mare a good, long rest.

"Naturally, Dolores has not done much. Fritz was paying the feed bills and fretting, wondering whether he had an asset or a liability, when one day the Soldier told him that by the time the fall meeting at Belmont opened, Dolores would be ready for a race."

"What happened?" Courtney demanded. Trained to scent a story, he was eager for details.

"To-day, at Belmont, I was with Bill," she answered quietly. "Old Soldier came around to the stand and called Fritz aside.

"'Dat mare goin' to run to-day,' he said. 'She's goin' to push her face under the wire in front.'"

"Fritz came back to us.

"'Soldier says Dolores will win,' he told us. 'Mr. Whitehouse, here's your chance to get back what you lost giving me the mare.'"

"'Hell! That plater can't win,' Bill snapped.

"We were all in Bill's box. Dolores was entered in the feature race of the day, and, having shown nothing in months, and little before that, she did not figure to be in the money. Dolores was as good as twenty to one, but the price was spotty, one bookmaker offering twenty-five and cutting to fifteen, even down to ten or less. It was evident some one was betting on Dolores, laying his own bets, and that there was no general backing.

"Bill went down onto the lawn and came back angry.

"The fools!' he said. 'Some one is betting Dolores in big chunks. You don't suppose Fritz is such a damned fool as to do that?'"

"Just then Fritz came back to us, sweat running down his face. He was a little excited.

"You're not throwing away money on that crow bait I gave you, are you?" Bill demanded.

"I'm betting on Dolores,' Fritz replied. 'She'll win, Mr. Whitehouse; get a bet down on her.'"

"'Hell!' Bill said, laughing. 'Kid, skirmish around the paddock and look them over, and bet this on Humming Bird.'"

"Humming Bird was the favorite, and

the price was six to five, some of the bookies holding him at even money.

"Bill kept the Kid darting back and forth from the paddock, and stood staring down at the crowd betting on the lawn and muttering about what a fool Fritz was.

"'Here,' he said, finally, 'Kid, bet a little more on Humming Bird.' He flipped a thousand-dollar bill to the Kid, and laughed.

"The Kid darted down the steps, and, as he went down the lawn, I saw some one stop him. They talked a minute, and the boy's face grew anxious. Instead of running to place the bet, he stood undecided an instant, and turned back. He whispered something to Bill, who shook his head angrily, swore, and said:

"You follow instructions. That's what I hire you for."

"Fritz came back just before the horses went to the post. He was sweating and red as he sat down with the girls.

"You've got as much chance to cash with that goat as you have to win an Atlantic City beauty prize,' Bill declared. It was strange for him to show temper like this.

"We all kidded Fritz about his horse, but he only shook his head, and said:

"You folks better get a bet down. Save yourselves, anyhow, if you don't win.'"

IV

THE girl looked moodily over toward the group at the far table.

"Did you get a bet down, Rita?" Courtney asked.

"No. Like the others, I laughed at Fritz and followed Whitehouse.

"You know Belmont in the fall?" she added. "The long, tree-shaded walks, the green lawn, the crowds around the horses in the paddock, the rush to get back into the stands when the bugle sounds."

Courtney nodded, visualizing the scene.

"The horses were going to the post, cantering around to the starting point, when Whitehouse lowered his glasses, and said: 'What did you get on that dog, Fritz?'"

"I got as good as fifty, at first,' Fritz answered. 'The price dropped. The best I could get for my last hundred was twenty. Some one else threw in a wad of dough and broke the price on me.'"

"What did you get on Humming Bird, Kid?" Whitehouse asked.

"He was eight to five once, but lucky to get even money at post time."

"There was something in the Kid's voice that did not sound natural. He seemed ill at ease—and it was the first time I ever saw the Kid nervous about anything. He was mopping his brow and pulling at his collar, and I could have thought he was shaking—and he was the Kid who never turned a hair, no matter what happened!"

"I thought Whitehouse noticed it, and was starting to ask a question when the barrier went up, and the crowd surged forward, yelling: 'They're off!' as they always do."

"The Kid had climbed onto a chair in the box, his field glasses leveled at the flying field, paying no attention to the cries of 'Down in front!' that arose. He was calling, droning the names of the horses as his trained eyes caught the flashes of color."

"The Kid's legs were shaking, and his heel tapped a tune on the chair. His throat was husky at first, but as his eyes caught the movement and the flashes of color, his voice steadied, and the old thrill of the track came into it."

"The Cub and Bullmich off together," he said, as the field settled into its stride. 'Happiness right behind them. Humming Bird a length, Ivory Garter, Antiseptic, Dolores last, caught flat-footed when the web went up.'

"Come on, you Humming Bird!" Bill said, tensely. I was surprised at his tone, and saw that his hands were clenched hard, until the nails were biting into the flesh and the ends of his fingers were white and bloodless.

"What?" Fritz was screaming. 'Dolores left at the post? Tell me it ain't true!'

"He was pulling at the Kid's legs, and it would have been funny if we had not known what it meant."

"Shut up! Leggo," the Kid complained, kicking backward to loosen the hold.

"At the quarter," he called. 'The Cub a length, Happiness second, Bullmich swung wide, Humming Bird moving up, Ivory Garter and Dolores head and head. Antiseptic last, and done for.'

"Come on, you Humming Bird, come on!" Whitehouse muttered.

"Bill was almost praying. I had never seen him so upset. His face was the color of ashes, and his neck was swollen, as he

moved as if actually riding the horse he was betting on.

"The horses were bunching on the back turn, and the distances between them seemed smaller."

"Three-quarters!" the Kid announced, his voice steadier now, but showing his repressed excitement. 'The Cub, Happiness, Humming Bird—Dolores half a length, and gaining, Bullmich, Ivory Garter, Antiseptic—'

"Leggo my leg!"

"That was addressed to Fritz, who, seeing Dolores moving up, had clutched the caller and was jerking at his trousers leg."

"Mein Gott, I can't see!" Fritz wailed, as the crowd arose to watch the fight of the horses down the stretch.

"Some one laughed, and Bill turned with a snarl."

"My God!" the Kid said, suddenly. 'The Cub swung wide at the turn—Happiness carried him out—Humming Bird coming through on the rail to the lead—Dolores a length and a half back, Bullmich, Ivory Garter—Antiseptic. My God—the Bird will win.'

"Thank God for that!" Bill remarked, sweating suddenly.

"Not yet, it ain't yet!" Fritz screamed.

'Come on, Dolores!'

"To hell with you and Dolores," Bill said. 'Watch that Bird run. Ride him, Orchid, ride him!'

"The crowd was up, shouting, as the favorite, seeing the chance, shot through on the rail, and Orchid, the best rider in the country, rated him into the lead in a few jumps, while the tiring leaders swung wide and straightened away in the center of the track."

"Humming Bird—come on, you Humming Bird! Oh, you Orchid!"

"The tone of the crowd suddenly changed."

"Hold his head up, Orchid. He's stopping!"

"Then, above the clamor, another shout arose:

"Come on, Dolores! Come on, you Dudley—come on!"

"The Kid's voice choked up suddenly."

"Humming Bird's stopping," he said thickly. 'Come on, Dolores! Come on, you Dolores!'

"What the hell—you rooting against my horse?" Bill shouted angrily.

"Ride him, Dudley! For God's sake,

ride him! Come on, you Dolores!' Fritz called out, almost praying.

"Humming Bird faltered a bit under the pace, seemed to stop, and the crowd roared as the little black boy, Dudley, riding with whip and spur, was urging Dolores. Dolores was at Humming Bird's shoulders, at his neck, and her nose showed in front.

"'She's in front.' The Kid dropped his glasses, jumped from the chair, and turned. That brunette over there suddenly began to cry, and threw her arms around the Kid's neck, sobbing out hysterically: 'She's winning, Kid—I knew it! We're out of the woods!'

"Bill was frothing and cursing.

"'What the hell's going on here?' he snarled. 'Celebrating because I'm losing my—'

"The horses were less than a furlong from home, when Bill, lifting his eyes, broke off his curses and shouted:

"'Come on, you Humming Bird!'

"The Kid whirled, shook the girl's arms loose, and looked at the horses.

"'My God!' he said aloud. 'She's bearing out—she's beaten!'

"'Gott in Himmel!' Fritz cried, slipping down into his chair. 'Dot boy Dudley let him swerve when he had it won!'

"'You had a nerve to bet that plater against a stake horse,' Bill remarked.

"The Kid was standing as if paralyzed, staring across the track, waiting for the board to go up with the numbers of the horses on it. The brunette was slumped down next to Fritz, sobbing, and Fritz was reduced to jelly, mumbling and ready to wail aloud.

"The numbers went up on the board—one, five, two.

"'The Humming Bird wins, Dolores second, The Cub grabs the show money.' The Kid's voice sounded as hollow as a cracked bell.

V

"THE grand stand crowd was standing and shouting as the happy Orchid came up, saluted the judges, and, dismounting, lifted the saddle and went to the scales," Rita resumed, after a pause of reminiscence. "Dudley, hurrying his mount, galloped back, leaped from the horse almost before the swipes held it, grabbed the saddle, raced for the scales, and then went up into the stand with the judges.

"The cheering stopped suddenly. The wise ones became anxious, as an attendant left the stewards and hurried after Orchid, who was on his way to the jockey room.

"As the numbers showing Humming Bird winner went up, I saw that blonde trying to make a hit with Bill, and I reached over and grabbed his arm. Bill and I had been sweethearts, and, even if I had given him up when he refused to quit the track, I had no intention of letting that girl, who had been playing up to Fritzzy, grab Bill when he was the winner of a bank roll.

"'You've got money, now, Bill,' I said. 'Quit it—before it gets you broke—as it came near doing just now.'

"'Fine!' Bill retorted, laughing. 'Fine to quit just when luck turns. There's a lot more where this came from.'

"'Please, Bill—don't risk it again,' I pleaded.

"'What the hell—' he said suddenly, forgetting me and staring at the board.

"The numbers were being changed. Number five went to the top, and the crowd, milling around, cheered and shouted and howled. Dolores had won.

"'Disqualified!' Bill groaned. 'Disqualified—and broke.'

"He shook off my hand, and turned. He had regained his nerve, and was trying to smile. I knew he was almost broke—with scarcely enough left to start over again; and it meant a lot to me. Bill isn't the kind that can be poor and not do something desperate.

"'I'll be back in a few minutes,' he said, steadily.

"'Mr. Whitehouse—wait—I've got to tell you—' The Kid grabbed at Whitehouse's arm and tried to hold him.

"'Later,' he said. 'I need a drink.'

"He went away, through the crowd, smiling, and walking steadily, although his face was as gray as that of a man with a death wound. He isn't the kind that lets the world know he's hurt.

"'Bring him back, Kid,' I pleaded. 'He'll do something—'

"'I've got to tell him,' the Kid said, breaking away and trying to follow.

"'Mein Gott, I vin a fortune what I alretty lost!' Fritz exclaimed, his English getting worse as he grew excited. He was laughing and half crying.

"The Kid came back in fifteen minutes, looking anxious.

"Lost him—he wasn't in the paddock," he reported.

"Here he comes now," I said. "He's got nerve. You wouldn't know he was ruined."

"Ruined!" the Kid exclaimed, laughing excitedly. "I'd like to be ruined that way—the rest of my life."

"Whether it was the drink or his own cold nerve, Bill was steady when he returned to the box.

"It's tough to have that candidate for the glucose works that I gave away out-luck and beat Humming Bird," he said.

"The Kid's face was a study.

"Mr. Whitehouse," he began, "I've always been straight with you, haven't I? I never tried to cheat you, or steal anything from you, did I?"

"What's the matter with you, Kid?" Bill asked. "No, you're as square as they make them."

"I've always followed orders and I have always got the best prices for you, haven't I?"

"Sure, Kid," Bill replied. "You've been straight and more faithful to me than I deserved. I'm sorry to lose you."

"Lose me?"

"Sure! I'll be piking from now on, laying my own bets, and a commissioner would starve to death."

"He took a couple of dollars out of his pocket and looked at them, then laughed bitterly. 'I'm down to tip money,' he said.

"Tip money?" The Kid doubled up suddenly and laughed.

"You're not going to fire me, Mr. Whitehouse, are you?" he demanded. "Maybe I deserve it—I didn't bet that last thousand you gave me—"

"You didn't what? You mean that you—" Bill asked.

"I didn't bet it on Humming Bird. Mr. Whitehouse, that is the first time I ever disobeyed—"

"What did you do—hold out on me?"

"You told me to bet on Humming Bird, but I bet it on Fritz's horse. I got forty and fifty to one for it!"

"For a minute Bill just stood staring, as if he had been hit on the jaw.

"You bet my money on that dog?"

"Got fifty for half of it, forty for the rest—they cut on me before I could place it," the Kid replied.

"My God!" Bill cried. "That saves—"

"He broke off suddenly and grabbed the Kid's hand, gripping it hard.

"You'll never know what this means to me, Kid," he said.

"I know what it means to me," the Kid declared, reaching an arm around the shoulder of the girl. "It means I'm through with the game. I've got my little pile, and the girl and I are going out into the country and buy a little home. You needn't fire me for disobeying orders, Mr. Whitehouse, I'm through!"

"Fire you!" Bill said, laughing in a funny way. "Kid, you saved me—my life, probably—and something better than that."

VI

RITA stopped talking and tapped the table thoughtfully as she looked across the nearly deserted dining room, toward the table. The party there was breaking up. Fritz and the two blondes arose, laughing, and went away.

The Kid and the brunette girl got up and shook hands with their host. From the earnestness, and the time their hands clung together, Courtney knew it was the end of their long partnership. The Kid was saying good-by to Bill and to the racing game.

"The Kid turned over a fortune to him," Courtney remarked, thoughtfully. "He probably kept him from going on the rocks entirely.

"And you, Rita," he interrupted himself suddenly; "I suppose you lost your money?"

"Every cent," she answered, lightly. "I plunged on Bill's judgment. I'm as clean as a hound's tooth. But Bill—Bill is all right."

Her eyes were shining with tears, but she was happy.

Whitehouse was sitting alone at the deserted table. Courtney and Rita watched him as he sat there. He was unconscious of the fact that they were observing his every change of expression. He seemed suddenly old and tired—tired of the game, tired of the thrill of winning.

He sat for some time, staring across the room, seemingly without seeing any one. Then, with a sudden gesture, he signaled the waiter, tossed a bill onto the cloth as a tip, and arose.

His fine eyes swept the tables as if seeking some friendly face. They rested a mo-

ment on Courtney, and a little light of half recognition came into the worn features.

Then he saw Rita. He came, threading his way among the tables, his eyes fixed on the girl, his face lighted with a sudden resolve.

Courtney realized that the climax of the story Rita had been telling him was being acted out before his eyes. Whitehouse appeared not to realize any one was with the girl. He stood across from her, his big hands gripping the edge of the table.

"Rita," he said, "may I say something to you?"

"I know what it is, Bill," she replied, rising and waiting. "You needn't say it—I'll answer."

"What is the answer, dear?" he asked.

"It is, 'yes,' " she answered.

For a few moments they stood, facing each other across the table. The big

man reached over and covered one of the girl's hands. She laughed quickly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Courtney," she said. "I want you to know Mr. Whitehouse, who is going to marry me. Bill, this is Mr. Courtney, a writing man. I have been telling him a story."

The men shook hands steadily.

"I'm sorry I can't finish the story, Mr. Courtney," Rita added. "Maybe you can find a happy ending for it."

"I have found it."

"What is it?" she asked, smilingly, as she slid her hand over to the arm of the big man.

"'And they were married and lived happily ever afterward—and never bet on another horse race,'" Courtney replied solemnly. "That's true, isn't it?"

"That's a perfect ending—and a true one," Rita declared.

HEAT

We tramped about the countryside—
My collie dog and I—
And saw the things that spring had done
To make the magpies cry.
The freshly budded leaves were green
And shaded black to white,
In luscious, tender waxiness
That glistened in the light.

When summer came, the gardens, spread
With exquisite array,
Had rows of quaint snap-dragons, tall
And delicate of spray.
They listened, ivory and rose,
Like conch-shells, tissue-thin,
Along the threaded strands of stems
That nimble loam can spin.

But autumn found the misty hills
Enmeshed in webs that ripped
Each morning as a sunny broom
Swept down and gently dipped
Until its long, deep straws would reach
The moldiest retreat,
And brush the gloominess away
With penetrating heat.

The ghostly stacks of corn that stand
Beneath the moon's hot eye
Have shriveled blades, like old men's hands
That tremble when they die.
The slap of golden waves resume
The patience of their beat,
And I, who watch, have come to find
Omnipotence in heat!

Sonia Ruthèle Novák

Lost and Won

WHEN DIANA CHASES HER NATURAL QUARRY ON SHIPBOARD,
HE MUST BE CUNNING, INDEED, TO ESCAPE

By O. Miller

FROM the deck of the Royal Mail steamship Warden Castle, there was nothing to see but Southampton's quayside sheds, and the quay in front of them under a frantic downpour of rain. Some God-speeders were miserably huddled there, reckless of the weather—a mushroomlike cluster of shiny umbrellas indicating the more cautious among them.

From the quay itself there was nothing to see but the steep gray side of the vessel pierced with glassy eyes, and topped just under the sky by a horizontal rail on which reposed knobs of various sizes and colors. Two of these knobs, covered respectively with scarlet and tan, were the heads of Hope Cressy and Crystal Harmon, who understood each other so well that words never needed to pass between them, except for purposes of concealment.

Closely did the two girls lean together and listlessly regard the trickle of late arrivals climbing the gangway—all featureless, unprofitable, insignificant. Then, when already the last warning had sounded, a belated, an apparently single and an astoundingly attractive young man hurled himself at the steps, followed by shore porters, heavily laden with luggage.

Hope Cressy, under the scarlet hat, drank in the faultless set of his clothes and the initials on his kit bag as it brushed past her.

Crystal Harmon, under the tan, devoured every detail of his face as he reached the promenade deck just as the ropes were loosed. Immediately a steward sprang out of nowhere and whisked him away below.

"Initials D.D.," Hope mused. "Dick, Dennis, Donald, Dent, perhaps—" She liked Dent, rather. Unattached, too; rare nowadays.

"I wonder if he is married?" Crystal

wondered. She felt she might enjoy the trip.

Simultaneously they looked up.

"I have marked him for mine," the blue eyes of Crystal beacons. "Mine, mine, mine," Hope's hazel orbs flashed.

The last farewells were being taken, the shore porters had found a way off, mysteriously after their kind, and there was no sign or token of the devastating young man.

"Come, darling," Hope said. "No use waiting here. Let's unpack."

Together, they sought the deck cabin they shared, littered with baggage, and chattered as they shook out vast quantities of feminine gear, calculated to stun the blackest cynic on the high seas.

"Deck cabin's jolly. More room," Hope commented.

"Yes, and cool, too, even in the tropics," Crystal agreed.

"Looks like a dull voyage. No one in the least interesting."

"Absolutely no one."

Now the Warden Castle was clear, and lifted with the tide. It was tea time. In the saloon they took their places at a center table, where sat a red man with a popping mustache—military. There was one vacant seat.

To the left a family sat; business people, most likely; son and daughter, flapper age. Terribly many women were present, alas!

A head wind springing up made things more depressing. After tea, back in the cabin, two girls unpacked; but really the rolling was frightful.

So they lay down among the gay little hillocks of clothes, Hope, because she felt shaky, and Crystal to keep her company. For such is friendship.

And, since they were still lying down

when the dinner bugle sounded its "Come, if you dare!" fate delivered to their table that evening the attractive stranger, who, being ignorant of fate, enjoyed with the military gentleman the rare pleasure of a meal unrestrained by the presence of exacting femininity.

II

It was morning of a clear day. First, sailors swabbing the perfectly spotless deck woke the friends. Then the pattering feet of fresh air fiends, getting salted in pyjamas and overcoats, prevented their sleeping again—and also proved not worth getting up for when inspected through the blind.

"I think I'll wear my blue pleated dress, if I can find it, this morning," Crystal yawned.

"Why not your striped silk? You look sweet in that," Hope advised.

Crystal knew perfectly well that blue was her very best color, and that the striped silk, bought solely to oblige a friend, at much below its real cost, was just so-so. But she merely said, "What 'll *you* wear, darling?"

"Any old rag. I've hardly a thing here." Hope had already decided on a specially dazzling effect in fawn and jade.

They talked clothes with that absorbing interest in detail which links woman to woman throughout the ages, until the morning bugle sounded its "Tallyho."

Then, having leisurely arisen and bathed in sea water beautifully hot, having adorned themselves with concentration and admirable patience in the cabin, where everything sloped beyond their reach, or fell heavily against them, they sought their table of yesterday—and met their great, their unexpected, their superb good fortune.

The unknown arose. He smiled and bowed with easy grace; so did the military man, rather superfluously present.

So did the two girls, and sat. Over their porridge, toast and coffee, haddock, and twice turned egg, they made merry.

Apollo was not very informative; rather intent on his food, in fact. But he was better, even better, than he appeared at the first blush.

Their resolve was sealed, their campaign outlined, conversation, clothes and all, before three remarks had been exchanged. There were other men, yes. But no, there were no other men.

He was speaking.

"Is this your first voyage?"

"Well, it is, really. Yes. And yours?"

"My seventh. It grows on one, you know. I feel like that Kipling chap:

"For to admire and for to see,
For to behold the world so wide,
It never done no good to me,
But I can't stop it if I tried."

"Poetry at breakfast," the officer burst in. "Jolly smart, that. Port's all right, I say; but there's altogether too much sea. If it weren't for the ladies, I assure you—"

Nobody answered that. They all ate. Afterward, on the deck, the ladies found their chairs and seated themselves cozily together, toes on rail, and inhaled the fresh breeze. A position farther back against the deck house would have commanded a wider field, but channel winds are apt to cause some pinkness of nose, which is a drawback.

So each intently regarded the sea with one eye, while Crystal's left and Hope's right swiveled chameleonlike by the power which women enjoy, and raked the deck fore and aft.

Crystal's range included a few prowlers, a few breezy and boisterous promenaders, and determined fat men hunting "fourths" at cards. Hope's purview took in several children pleading with the quartermaster for deck games, and the flapper, in a scarlet jersey and tam, stuck to the railing with her brother and a pair of army binoculars. No "D.D." appeared anywhere.

"Let's have a look at the passenger list, and see if we can guess the people," Crystal said brightly. "Anstruther, Mr. F., Mrs. F., Miss Enid, Miss Florence, Miss Margery, Miss Nancy. Atwood (Major)—that's the one at our table.

"Beadle, Bosworth, Miss Jane, Miss Mary, Carlisle, Mrs. B., Channing, Sir Phillips and Lady, Miss Beatrice, Mr. Jim—that girl.

"The Ds. Only one D.D."

Their eyes swooped. Mr. David Denton, they saw—and, in letters of fire, Mrs. David Denton. Ah, no! Not that; impossible. If so, where was she hiding? Hateful creature; sick, perhaps. That's why he wasn't about. But then she must have come aboard early.

"Duller than ever this morning," Crystal complained.

"I wish to goodness the voyage was

over." Hope's control was sublime. "I think I'll take a walk," she added.

"Good idea; you look green."

"No need to rub it in, darling."

She tottered away; more must be discovered of this. At the corner of the deck the gentle wind almost blew her off her feet. The flapper came to the rescue, and fell into step beside her.

"Bad sailor?" the young one inquired.

"Pretty awful."

"Soon be all right when we're out of the bay. I think it's going to be a lovely voyage. Don't you? It's my first. Topping, after a perfectly rotten school."

"My friend and I were feeling rather dull. We don't know any one at all on board. Perhaps that's why."

"My people are here, of course, and Mr. Lunt's a friend of father's. He's the tall man at your table."

"Oh, yes, that one! I didn't know his name."

"Gervase Lunt."

Not D. D.! That wasn't his bag at all. How dazzling!

"What does he do?"

"Travels all over. Says he's looking for a wife. We always chaff him."

Hope's heart was too full for speech for a moment.

"Come with me, do, and meet Crystal. I must see how she's been getting on."

Crystal had been getting on very well, indeed, for the unnamed had strolled up and taken Hope's vacant seat within two minutes of her departure. Crystal was reading then.

"Kipling, I see. Do you like him?" he asked.

"Simply adore him. Especially this bit."

Over the companionable book they made great strides. Their heads were close together when Hope and the flapper returned, becomingly flushed. There was talk and laughter, to which presently the major added himself.

"Sports soon," he announced. "We must make up foursomes for deck tennis."

"But I can't play a stroke!" Crystal cried. She turned deliciously to Gervase. "You must teach me."

"Not much good myself," he confessed.

"Oh, but I'm sure you're an absolute champion," Hope said, her eyes dwelling on his. They were sitting in a row, in that deep surrounding silence which occurs

on board ship only when every one is thinking of lunch.

"There ain't a sound for miles an' miles, Except the jiggle of the screw."

The Kiplingite murmured that.

"I do want to see a screw jiggle," Hope declared. "Will you take me?"

Again her eyes looked deep into the eyes of Gervase.

"Rather," he said. "Conducted parties of any size."

"I prefer conducted parties of one. Aha!" The gallant major laughed.

They became silent again, and stared at their feet, which stared back at them. Trixie, the flapper, wore canvas, rubber-soled shoes as like her brother's as possible; Hope's feet arched in jade green morocco; Gervase's in slightly worn buckskin; Crystal's in speckled lizard; Atwood's in uncreased patent glacé.

At last, Trixie shifted her two shoes independently, and departed on her affairs. But the other eight soles were thenceforth so constantly united, that they might well have belonged to one single creature; excepting, that is, for the intervals of sleep.

III

Who shall trace the steps of a man hunt on an ocean liner, or fathom the infinite wiles of the huntress, pursuing her relentless way under the mask of perfect indifference. Who shall explain the complete ignorance of the hunted, who knows and notices nothing until his eyes are opened by some other woman?

Gervase Lunt didn't seem to come across any other woman during the next week, excepting Trixie, who didn't count, and who was always in a hurry. The fair Crystal and the dark Hope were beginning to feel the strain of not being able ever to secure a definite advantage by day, or to discuss the chances of battle by night.

The major was a detestable nuisance in himself, but invaluable as umpire, witness, accessory, and alibi. Things were going on all the time.

First, Hope wanted to change her table for one nearer the door; she was not a good sailor, and there was no use pretending. And Crystal said she would have come, darling, but there wasn't a seat, and darling dared not risk it. She simply couldn't be bright at meals in rough weather, and there Crystal shone.

Then Crystal played bridge, and Hope didn't; she had to watch, and the way men concentrate on cards is heartbreaking. Crystal looked radiant in the morning, and Hope really wonderful at night under those tropic moons.

But there it was. He was equally charming to both, and so bafflingly non-committal that each decided privately that he must be the simplest bachelor ever landed at the altar, or the wildest fly that ever kept clear of the golden web.

Five days from the end of the voyage, the crisis came.

"I'm going to change my cabin, darling," Crystal announced on that sultry evening as they dressed for dinner.

"What *ever* for?" Hope gasped, keeping her horrified expression to the mirror, which sympathetically repeated it. She pinned the last low curl just northeast of the right eyebrow, and faced the deserter with unshaken calm.

"It's so frightfully hot here," Crystal pined, powdering her pretty shoulders, "and I can't sleep because people tramp about all the time."

"I thought you said, when we started, that it was cooler here. And how do you know there's room elsewhere?"

"Oh, I asked to-day, and there is. Please do me up, and then I'll do you."

"Oh, certainly, darling, come here," and she eased Crystal's scented person into a close-bodied gown of divine blue, with bouffant hips. "When do you move?"

"The steward's shifting my stuff to-night, during dinner. I told the purser to-day that I couldn't stand the smell of the new paint any longer."

"But you said just now that it was the noise."

"Well, it's both together; but I thought of the paint first. Don't be cross, Hope."

"Of course I'm not cross."

Of course she wasn't. Only that morning she had wished Crystal away so that she could meet Gervase alone—oh, so early in the morning on deck, and here was the adversary leaving the field. Cross, indeed!

"Let me do you up, darling," Crystal offered, delighted to have it over.

"Thanks, awfully, yes. Please begin at the waist and work up. No, it's not tight, really, at all."

It may have been tight, but the effect of the sheathlike amber satin, revealing her slenderness, was completely dazzling. She

applied a last touch of lipstick to her curved mouth, and flicked out an enormous black fan before they left the cabin.

She shone with inner radiance. The saloon rustled with excitement at the entry of the brilliant pair.

"Which will it be now?" young Jim Channing inquired of his sister.

"Fifty-fifty until now," she decided promptly. "But I'll ask Gerry. He won't mind."

"I've changed my cabin," Crystal sighed to the devoted table. "It was so noisy."

Something stirred behind the major's shirt front. How delicate was the appearance of the little blue girl.

"I transferred down below," she went on casually.

"Bravo! All the best people are there," her admirer affirmed.

"What's the number of your cabin, darling?" Hope asked suddenly.

"Two ninety-five."

"Then we'll be neighbors," said Gervase with his smile. "Mine's two ninety-six."

"Is it, really?" Crystal questioned, with limpid eyes uplifted. Not for nothing had she been named Crystal. "How funny that is!"

"Funny?" the disgusted Hope mused. "Funny! I might have guessed. Little rotter." Nevertheless, she beamed uncloudedly on the circle.

"Who's going to support me at the concert to-night?" she asked. Everybody would, of course.

"Do you perform, also?" Gerry asked Crystal.

"No, I've no parlor tricks. But Hope sings divinely."

"I make a noise," the modest artist admitted.

Time dawdled, then, until the concert was well under way, and Hope sang unutterable things to Gervase in the words of "Down in the Forest." He was thrilled; he understood, she was sure.

But there was an encore, and he had gone. When the applause subsided, she caught up her feathered wrap and stole to the deserted side of the deck.

Steps followed. A cigar appeared. It only slightly preceded Mr. Lunt.

Absorbed, she stared into infinite distance. Then she turned deliberately to walk away.

"I say! Do come back and let me tell you something."

She started violently, and caught her breath.

"I didn't notice you," she declared.

"I'm no good at compliments, but the way you sang just now, Hope—I mean Miss Cressy—"

Bother the man! Why must he mean Miss Cressy?

"It's from always hearing your friend call you that," he apologized.

Not for nothing was her name Hope. She put her little hand on his sleeve.

"Ah, but all friends should," she whispered sweetly.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I always do think of you as—"

"Hope! Hope!" Crystal's voice sounded jarringly, and she appeared fluttering toward them, the major in her wake. "We've looked everywhere for you. The concert is over. Let's dance."

The moment crashed. Hope gritted her teeth.

"Too tired, darling," she said.

"Then you must keep Major Atwood company here. He doesn't dance. But I must. Dance with me, Mr. Lunt?" Crystal pouted. Crystal smiled. Crystal bore him off.

"I think Miss Harmon—is like a sunbeam," the dazzled soldier chanted.

"I know she is an utter little beast," Hope said to herself. She bit back a wicked word. "Let's go after them and watch. It's dull here." She turned her back on the stars.

"That's what I always say," he agreed. "Too much of it. Got to look at it sometimes, but why for choice?"

"I'll change my mind, and dance," Hope decided.

And so they did, turn and turn about, until the band packed up and went to bed. Crystal sought her new quarters, triumphant; and Hope returned to hers, thoroughly infuriated.

The major wended his way to the smoke room, that nursery of romance, and Gervase would have accompanied him, but on the way he encountered Trixie, Jim, and the Anstruther girls. Trixie grabbed his arm with urgency.

"Come with us and see the phosphorescence before turning in," she said, and they followed the rest aft, where right before them appeared the churned path of foam, with its submerged lights a white stripe on the sea's back.

With secrecy Trixie whispered: "Which is it? Please tell me; I've a bet on."

"Which what?"

"Which has won?"

"Won what?"

"Don't be so annoying, Gerry. You, of course. You are getting engaged, aren't you? Please say you are."

"You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do."

He lurched forward over the jeweled track. She jerked him back.

"There, I've saved your life. Question is, whose luck is it—Hope's or Crystal's?"

"Honest, I never thought of them like that."

"But you like them, don't you?"

"Rather. They're delightful—but it never crossed my mind."

"Perhaps it crossed theirs."

"Couldn't possibly. I've never said a thing."

"Then I'll let Jim know it's off. Don't mind me asking?"

"Of course not. You can ask anything."

As they went back, all the cabin lights were out. Passing Hope's cabin, her blind was shot up, and Trixie saw her dawdling over her hair, in a flowered negligee.

Gervase passed with eyes front. He felt rather nervous for some reason. Going along to his cabin, the faint *swish-swish* of the seas outside, and the ship's creaking, made him jump.

He had a funny idea that his name was being whispered. It was merely an impression that passed when he reached his cabin, and that did not prevent his falling soundly asleep.

IV

THE whispers, however, followed him into his dreams. They were vague, disjointed, uncertain, but growing clearer, until unmistakably he heard:

"Please, please, Mr. Lunt, do wake up. Oh, oh, oh, p-please, Mr. Lunt!"

He started up, really awake. The door curtain billowed in with the draft; a white hand drew it aside, and a golden-haired girl almost fell over the threshold—Crystal, no less.

"I say, whatever's the matter?" He sat bolt upright with dropped jaw.

"I'm s-s-so frightened. There's an enormous beetle or something in my b-b-bunk, and I've rung and rung—" Her face quivered like a baby's.

"Poor little girl. I'll do it in for you."

He struggled awkwardly into his dressing gown, owing to the constricted space, and swung to the floor. "Now for the fray."

"P-please don't think me awfully stupid," she whispered, her head, with its clinging perfume, dangerously near his shoulder.

"Of course not. Gracious, no! Where's the monster?"

"T-this way."

Gingerly, she turned and entered her cabin, he following.

She indicated the bunk. "Oh, it's gone!"

There was a sudden rustle outside. Quick as thought she snapped out the light, flew into bed, and held the clothes round her chin.

He stood limply in the corner, hands hanging. There followed a light step, and Hope's voice.

"May I come in, dear? Oh, you're in the dark! Where's the switch?"

"Please don't turn it on. I've a frightful headache."

Gervase flattened himself, perspiring freely. Oh, agony, were they going to talk all night?

"Poor darling. I'll get you an aspirin. Hold on a minute."

Mercifully, she withdrew.

"Why did you turn out the light?" Lunt whispered hoarsely.

"I was so taken by surprise," she quavered nervously.

"People might misunderstand. I think I'll go now, as the insect has vanished."

"Yes, do. Sweet of you to help. Good night."

He whisked back into his own cabin. Hope returned with the aspirin.

"I came down before to collect my watch from the bathroom," she explained, "and I thought I saw a light."

"Curse the luck!" Crystal muttered.

"What's that?"

"This vile head of mine. Give me the tablet and I think I'll sleep."

"Right, I'll leave you, then."

"Good night, darling!"

Hope slept extremely well after this timely intervention. Crystal bit two handkerchiefs to shreds.

Gervase looked at the time. It was two fifteen. He pushed his cabin trunk against his door and composed himself to rest.

When he arrived on deck later on the same morning, the first pretty thing that met his eyes was Hope, neat and fresh in a cream and scarlet jumper suit.

"Hello!" she greeted him, with enormous surprise. "I didn't expect to meet *any one* for *hours*. How jolly!"

"Let's walk the plank together."

She matched his manly stride, and her skirts blew bravely about her. Again the moment was hers. But no. Unkind destiny intervened in shape of the Channing children, sprinting.

They had to join in, round and round the deck, hundreds and hundreds of times. Hope grew faint, and failed; it was beyond her altogether. She longed to smack them; that early rising for *nothing*, when time was so short, and the situation desperate.

At breakfast time they arranged to visit the engine room together, all four. In spite of the midnight reverse, Crystal was gloriously animated.

"How's the headache, darling?"

Gervase, the innocent, reddened and wriggled. Crystal assumed a transparent expression.

"Awfully much better, thanks."

To Hope, the engine room was truly dreadful, hateful, smelly, greasy, stifling, dangerous — dangerous. Could she dare? Was it worth it? She thought so.

Horried, they crowded round her when she missed her step at the bottom of the steel ladder and fell heavily, turning her foot.

Gervase flew to support her; the major dashed for water, although there was none present below boiling point, and Crystal accorded her sincere if mute admiration. It had also crossed her mind, but she lacked the nerve.

The afflicted one was bravely the center. No, she wouldn't have the doctor. No, it was only a turned ankle, not a sprain.

Yes, she could manage to walk if they helped her. Gervase helped her, and in the excitement called her Hope again.

Painfully she emerged, and tenderly they put her in a chair outside the cabin. She lay back in great content.

"Better now?" Lunt demanded.

"Yes, much."

"Sure?"

"It's nice of you to mind."

"Of course I mind."

"Why, I wonder?"

"Silly little girl."

"Here's some beef tea," Crystal chirruped, appearing, as it were, out of the sea. Hope wanted to pour it over her bobbed head, but said:

"Who'll lunch with me on deck?"

"We all will," they chorused—and did.

After lunch came cards. Crystal partnered Gervase. Her eyes had hidden meanings, and again he felt nervous.

He had thought of going on deck for a stroll after the rubber, but desisted, as Hope was there, waiting. Her eyes had hidden meanings, too.

He began to feel shadowed, haunted. Then he felt Crystal's little slipper caress his ankle under the discreet baize. He revoked.

"Sorry to be so stupid," he apologized.

"If you'll forgive me, I'll get some one to take my hand. I've got to get a shave, anyhow."

A hungry "fourth" substituted gladly for him, and he fled to the barber shop, where he found Trixie and Jim choosing souvenirs with great intensity. He clutched at Trixie like a drowning man.

"Come and sit in the corner and advise me, you wise woman," he pleaded.

"I believe you've been flirting after all," she said. "Keep away, Jim. This is no place for a brother. And I should not step aside to listen to Gerry's tale of woe."

"Please be sensible," Gervase begged.

"I am solemn."

"Then listen." He detailed the chase, of which he was the quarry.

"You are absolutely doomed," she decided. "They will both propose before we sight land."

Suddenly a bright thought struck him.

"You can save me!" he declared.

"How?"

"Get engaged to me."

"No, I simply can't."

"Why?"

"I'm already privately engaged to the first officer, and to the Marconi man, and Mr. Dent has told me that his wife doesn't understand him, which is always a beginning, isn't it?"

"How shocking."

"You know I'd do anything to help you, Gerry, but there it is—and *nobody* would believe it."

"Do, for me. I feel it's my last chance."

"Well, I'll do this; I'll tell the others to stand over for three days, and you can announce it, and finish the voyage in peace."

9

"Through yet?" Jim called. "Because I want to show you a working model of a safety razor I have found for father."

"Yes, we've finished," caroled Trixie.

"And we're engaged."

"Garn."

"Truth. You go and spread the news, and we'll explain later."

"Not a hope, you're only a kid. Dad would throw me overboard; besides, there's no ring."

"But there is a ring," Gervase said.

"There's a ring here."

The barber, rising to the occasion, produced a card of real rolled gold "dress" rings with real glass gems. Trixie chose a diamond and sapphire. Gervase paid for it—half a crown.

The barber congratulated the betrothed, and then Trixie skipped off with Jim, while her *fiancé* had his long-delayed shave.

Whatever a barber knows at three o'clock, the whole world knows at three thirty. At tea time the Warden Castle hummed and buzzed with the delightful news. One of the Anstruther girls burst out with it to Hope as she lay extended at her cabin door: "Mr. Lunt's engaged!"

Surely not! Hope dared not frame the vital question. She had no need to.

"The little Channing girl; quite a romance, wasn't it? We didn't suspect for a moment; in fact we thought *you*—"

Hope had never encouraged the tactless Anstruthers. She swiftly recovered from the buffet.

"I guessed it some time ago. Rather silly, I think."

"He's awfully good looking," the Anstruther girl sighed.

"Middling," Hope said. "I like dark men, personally. My *fiancé's* dark."

Crystal strolled up.

"How's the foot, darling?" she demanded, cheerfully.

"Much better, thanks. I'm going down to dinner, after all."

She felt glad now that it had never really hurt. She felt generous toward Crystal. She had lost, but Crystal had not won.

She wondered if Crystal knew.

"I suppose Gervase Lunt will be changing his table from to-night," she said suddenly, casually.

"Why, naturally," Crystal agreed, without emphasis. "I think Mr. Beadle will take his place. Only two days more; and Mr. Beadle's quite amusing. You know

I've moved back to our cabin. There was an insect in mine last night."

"I thought there was something," Hope said.

V

THE Channings were horrified at the levity of the proceedings, but had to accept Gervase Lunt at their table in the rôle of future son-in-law. He felt pleasantly light-headed during dinner, his ears buzzing with congratulations.

But so vivid was the animation of the circle he had left, so joyous the laughter and toasts, that he began to wonder whether the situation had not been the creature of his morbid fancy.

He was even slightly piqued at their indifference to his new status.

Later, a great moon clambered up into the masthead to watch the course of that romantic evening. In a secluded corner they knew of, Crystal sat with the major.

"I shall be very sorry to leave this dear old ship," she murmured.

"I know I shall," he replied.

"I shall always remember your kindness, dear major," she sighed.

He gulped.

"I wish you would call me Horace," he said.

"Thank you, then—Horace."

"May I ask you something—Crystal?"

"Yes."

"Can you guess what?"

"Yes."

She stroked his stubbly hair.

"I thought you cared for—for some one else—Lunt," he hazarded.

"Mr. Lunt and I were never more than acquaintances."

He stared at the moon, enraptured, and wondered if he might kiss her.

Near by, Hope and Mr. Beadle conversed in low tones.

"How divine the sea is," she said. "Do you love the sea, Mr. Beadle?"

"So-so," he answered. "I travel on business."

"The voyages are your holidays; you

can't like landing much. But perhaps there's some one waiting—"

"Yes, wife and four children," he replied. "Do you mind a pipe, Miss Cressey? It's good tobacco."

"Not at all," she asserted. "I've just heard from my *fiancé*, who is coming five hundred miles to meet me." She indicated what she felt must be the south. "I've had a long, long wire from him to-night."

There was dancing, also, and Trixie circled the lighted deck with Gervase, "Just for the sake of appearances," she explained.

"How beautifully you dance, Trix," he said.

"One dances almost all the time at school," she replied. "Nothing else to do."

"You've got to give me every dance to-night," he said.

"Oh, but I can't. My officer is waiting for me now, and my Marconi man comes off duty soon."

"Don't tease me, Trixie, dear. There's no officer, is there?"

"Why?"

"It would break my heart."

"You can't propose, you know, Gerry, because we're already engaged."

He held her closely, and looked down to his shoulder level. Her hair was short and curly, dark, but with gold somewhere.

"I'm tired of this silly engagement," he announced. "Let's break it off and start a real one."

"How can we?"

"Come along here," he said, and steered her all down the lighted deck to the far side of the wind screen, where it was dark.

"Like this," he said, and let go her hands; "and like this," and he caught her again.

"Now it's done, and I'm going to kiss you," he said.

"Not unless there's some one looking, Gerry."

"But there is some one looking."

"Who?"

"Why, the moon, silly."

"Oh!"

So she let him, for of course there was.

WONDER

WONDER of earth and sky perpetual,

Of growing, breathing things, the winds that stir,
And yet the greatest wonder of them all

That I am loved by her!

Clinton Scollard

The Bride's Biscuits

PREPARE TO SHARE YOUR PITY WITH A ROOSTER, A YOUNG
PIG, AN OLD GOAT, A BANDIT, AND A NEW HUSBAND

By Robert McBlair

"NO more biscuits, thanks," Mr. Rollo Parsons replied.

Mrs. Parsons, his wife, considered herself six pounds too heavy, and did not eat wheat.

One biscuit, dismembered, lay in artfully concealed fragments upon the red oil-cloth underneath the edges of Mr. Parsons's plate; while two others, like bulbous and reproachful eyes, stared at Mr. Parsons from the cracked white platter.

"I'll put these in my pocket," Mr. Parsons added, diplomatically, "and take them along for an afternoon snack."

"All right, darling."

Mrs. Parsons arose with a bustling of starched linen and carried the granite ware coffeepot into the kitchen.

Mr. Parsons hurriedly pushed back his chair, scraped the biscuit fragments into his palm, and threw them out of the small square window, where they were greeted by a high, shrill pipe of inquiry from the dominicker rooster.

Mr. Parsons picked up the two biscuits, put one in the pocket of the khaki coat hanging on the wall, and, after glancing toward the kitchen door, threw the other out of the window. There was a sharp grunt of pain and resentment from the spotted shoat, which rustled rapidly away through the drying grass outside the log cabin.

Mr. Parsons's little head—large at the freckled cheek bones and small at the receding chin—was thrust forward to investigate. He heard Mrs. Parsons's returning footsteps, and became interested, instead, in adjusting the horn spectacles which curved behind his flaring ears.

When his wife entered, his bodkinlike body was bent like an elbow, his thin neck was twisted as if he were trying to see over

the top of the mountain. The shoulder blades, pointing like fingers through the gray flannel shirt, helped to emphasize the leanness of the shanks incased in oiled leather boots. The butt of a revolver protruded from the pocket above the shiny seat of the khaki pants.

"They haven't caught that fellow yet," he remarked, by way of diversion, as he stood up. "Hennessy said he glimpsed him on Bear Mountain yesterday. Said he looked kind of sick and peaked, living on what he can find. I don't imagine Hennessy wanted much to come too close to him. I am just a bookkeeper, a private citizen; but if I was a deputy—"

Rollo let this menace to lawbreakers brood unfinished in the air.

"Now, Rollo, don't you do anything!"

Rollo sucked in his underlip, thoughtfully. The overhanging nose, the spectacles, gave his triangular countenance an appearance of owl-like wisdom.

"There's a reward out for him," he mentioned, threateningly.

"Now, Rollo! Please!"

Mrs. Parsons pressed her square white hands together against the bosom of the blue checked apron. Her protruding brown eyes, rather large for her plump oval face, were pointed upward and outward at him, pleadingly.

Rollo Parsons enjoyed the implications of the situation. Four months earlier he had been a teacher of bookkeeping and accounting in a night-and-day business school in Cincinnati. He had been considering joining himself in matrimony to the teacher of stenography, a spinster of uncertain years, but of no uncertain willingness to be his bride.

In preparation for the responsibilities of the event, Rollo, who was nothing if not

painstaking and thorough, had applied for a twenty-year paid-up endowment policy of life insurance.

The life insurance company's examining physician had been, in a sense, flattering. He had said that Rollo had some of the most interesting complications he had seen in thirty-nine years of practice.

He added, confidentially, that his company was pretty lax in its physical requirements, but that if they took on persons like Rollo, they would go bankrupt in a year.

And he remarked, without extra charge, that if he were in Rollo's shoes, he would get a job away from the city somewhere, in a slightly higher altitude, where he would have to walk to and from work. And, by all means, not to worry.

Rollo, trying not to worry, had hurried around to his regular physician, who, after an examination, and after asking Rollo a few questions about his appetite, had made the quite positive diagnosis that the life insurance doctor was a jackass.

But a man can't be on the brink of death from organic complications at one moment, and back in perfect health the next, without entertaining the suspicion that life, after all, may be of very uncertain duration.

So Rollo had compromised by locating a bookkeeping job with a contractor who was building a railroad tunnel in the West Virginia mountains. The salary considerably exceeded his pay as a teacher.

The spinster of stenography, who was none other than the present Mrs. Parsons, had expressed a willingness to accompany him, and a determination to learn to do their cooking. A month ago they had arrived, and had set up housekeeping two miles from work, in a deserted log cabin which had the unexpected charm of being rent free.

"Well," Rollo agreed now, as to bandit catching, "if you ask me not to, I won't."

II

FOR the first time he began to feel happy in his new environment. In the beginning, the flannel shirts and corduroy or khaki trousers of the men on the job, their unrestrained profanity, their matter-of-fact acceptance of the Saturday night brawls at the saloon, ending sometimes in shooting and death, their casual "toting" of guns, had filled him with an uneasy dread, not relieved by their rather brutal hilarity at

his punctilious politeness and hesitant questions.

His hastily purchased flannel shirt, khaki trousers, and laced boots, after newness had worn off, had given him a sort of protective coloring. He had secretively adopted a gun.

And now, as a climax of his ascendancy in the midst of turmoil, his own wife was imploring him not to go forth into the mountains and bring to justice a fugitive who had killed a man.

Rollo would have prolonged the agreeable session, but the tin alarm clock on the field stone mantel warned him that his time for the midday meal had elapsed. He permitted himself a moment in which to absorb, with unwonted appreciation, the charm of his helpmeet.

Mrs. Parsons's hair, neither brown nor black, was parted in the middle, and came down over her ears to be knotted behind the plump neck in a manner which somehow symbolized for him the ultimate in feminine charm and submission. The plump figure in the blue checked apron gave him an agreeable impression of domesticity.

Impulsively, he kissed her on the cheek.

"Now don't you forget those potatoes, the bacon, the eggs, the butter, and that bag of flour," she admonished, flushing at his emotional outburst. "There isn't a thing in this house to eat. I've used up that bag of flour we found here, and, if you forget, we'll have to eat these left-over biscuits, and gravy."

"I won't forget them," Mr. Parsons promised, sincerely. He put on his coat, went out into the midday sunshine, turned to wave to her where she stood on the porch before he tramped around the bend, and plopped along in the dust of the yellow clay road. On the left the dun river coursed sluggishly beyond a sparse curtain of sycamores and willows.

Mr. Parsons heard ahead the rattle and clanking of an approaching wagon. He was alone on the road; visions of an outlaw rose before him, and he glanced around with the idea of leaping up the gradual slope of the low green mountain and finding a hiding place behind a hemlock.

But before he could decide, the vehicle, drawn by a gray mule, came at a spanking gait around the curve, and he saw in the driver's seat the squat figure of Mr. Hennessy, timekeeper on the tunnel construction work, and deputy sheriff at large.

"Hi, there, Rollo! Whoa, mule, damn yo' onery hide! Hey, Rollo, take one of these here handbills. I told the sheriff I didn't see no sense in printin' a old picture of a man everybody knows by sight; but election's comin' on, and— Whoa, mule!"

Rollo Parsons accepted the sheet of glazed white paper, reluctantly. If Izzard, from somewhere up on the mountain, should see him take it, the outlaw might assume that Mr. Parsons was on his trail. Rollo preferred not to be associated with the matter.

He examined the handbill with a morbid and uncomfortable fascination. At its top, in large black type, was "\$500 REWARD." Under this was a photograph of a slender young man in a high V collar, a coat too small for him, with a tin foil of violets in the buttonhole, and a speaking checked vest.

His hair was parted in the middle of his narrow head, and brought in a graceful spit curl down over each eyebrow. One ear was clipped off at the top.

"There's a chance to pick up a tidy bit of money, Rollo. Want me to git yo' made a deppity?"

Rollo Parsons flushed to find that Hennessy was staring at him with a good-humored grin on his fat, whisky-reddened face.

"No," Rollo replied, seriously. "No. You see, I'm busy just now."

He jumped at the sound of a blatant "*Ma-a-a!*" right in his ear. A bearded black and white goat, a rope around its horns, looked at him over the side of the wagon with an unfriendly expression.

Mr. Hennessy laughed out loud.

"I'm movin'," he explained. "Goin' to board at the commissary. Allowed I'd stop by and ask yo' missus if she'd keep this varmint for me till I gits me another place. It's fine for cleanin' up trash aroun' the cabin."

Rollo didn't find the animal prepossessing, but he nodded.

"Don't say anything to her about Izzard," he requested. "You know, women folks get scared. With men it's different."

"All right," Mr. Hennessy agreed, chuckling. "Git up, mule!"

III

ROLLO PARSONS watched the vehicle begin to roll slowly away. Suddenly the hair arose on his scalp.

On the splintery and dusty boards, in the shadow under the driver's seat, lay what was certainly a human figure. It was arrayed in jute bagging, but surely there was no mistaking the contour of a human chest, the slope of shoulders, and the shape of a head under the wrappings.

Mr. Hennessy looked back over his shoulder, saw Rollo gazing after him, turned away, and curled the blacksnake whip around the belly of the gray mule, which broke into a startled gallop.

Rollo experienced a queer feeling at the sight of the bouncing body, obscured occasionally by the black and white goat which was doing a galvanic dance from side to side of the wagon in an endeavor to keep its footing.

The wagon disappeared around the turn. The sounds of its flight diminished.

Faintly, on the air, floated a shouted: "Whoa, mule!" It had stopped at Rollo's cabin.

Rollo Parsons stared at the white dust settling slowly back to the road. Maybe Hennessy had captured the outlaw. Maybe the crude humor of the mountain explained the grin that had accompanied Hennessy's suggestion of making him a deputy.

Even a hardened mountaineer, however, would scarcely be paying a casual social visit, concerning a goat, while the body of a dead man lay in his wagon. But Rollo recalled the alarmed expression on Hennessy's face, when he had looked back.

These mountaineers were as thick as thieves. The law, which tried to keep them from turning a crop of corn into whisky, they considered an instrument of obvious injustice.

It was possible that Izzard, with a reward on his head, was being conveyed by gradual degrees to safety in the wagon of Deputy Hennessy. Or it was possible, in these barbaric mountains, that the body had to do with, maybe, a private quarrel of Hennessy's own.

The whole business gave Rollo a sense of uneasiness. He thought of returning home and leaving his revolver with Mrs. Parsons for her protection. Reaching into his coat pocket, where he sometimes kept it, he brought forth, instead, the biscuit.

This momentarily diverted him. Mrs. Parsons had followed with fidelity the directions in the cookbook. But, whether it was the book, or Mrs. Parsons, or the bag

of flour which they had found there, Mr. Parsons had found the biscuits to be of a strange consistency.

He had not mentioned it to his wife, but one time they would be springy and elastic, with some of the unchewable qualities of a rubber heel; while at others they would be as hard as concrete.

The biscuit under inspection seemed to combine both of these qualities. It would stretch and spring back into place, in one corner, whereas the rest of it was more adamant than stone.

Rollo, always of a philosophical turn, gave the two aspects of the biscuit some consideration as his large feet plopped through the yellow dust of the road. Not being able to arrive at any satisfactory explanation, he threw it over the river bank, where it slid and clattered down a shelf of shale, until, apparently having landed on its elastic side, it leaped wildly into the river.

This agility reminded Rollo, for some reason, of the outlaw on the mountain, and he thought again that Mrs. Parsons should have a gun for her protection. If he took her his own revolver, however, it would mean that he would have to return in the evening along two miles of lonely road without a weapon. He decided that a visit from the outlaw at the cabin was entirely unlikely.

"You've got to take some chances in this life," he concluded, bravely. He pushed on toward the commissary.

IV

MRS. PARSONS, meanwhile, had heard a wagon rattle to a stand, and had hurried to the front door, to find Mr. Hennessy climbing puffily down from his springless seat.

"Mornin', Mis' Parsons," he said, untying a rope from a seat stanchion. "Jes' run into that husban' of yo'rn, and he ast me to lend yo'-all the loan of this here varmint for a spell."

Mrs. Parsons's surprise was mingled with alarm as Mr. Hennessy dropped the tailboard of the wagon and began to pull on the rope, the other end of which was attached to the crumpled horns of a goat with one white and one brown eye.

The animal *Ma-a-ed* unpleasantly, shook its tail, and planted its four horny little hoofs far apart; but Mr. Hennessy ruthlessly dragged it out to where it was

forced to make a scrambling leap to the ground.

"I'll tie it by this here dogwood sapling under the window," Mr. Hennessy said. "He's a wonderful trash remover, Mis' Parsons. Las' Thursday he et the leg outen my best pants. Come here an' pat him, Mis' Parsons. Gentle an' kind as a dove."

Mrs. Parsons gingerly touched the springy hair between the crumpled horns. The creature shook its stub of tail, and reared, but Mr. Hennessy kicked it in the stomach, and it quieted down.

"Yo' see, I'm movin' over to the commissary for a spell, and I'm jes' leavin' my things around." Mr. Hennessy took off his black Stetson and scratched a mop of graying red hair. "Say, Mis' Parsons, yo' reckon yo' can keep a little secret with a fellow?"

"Why, yes," Mrs. Parsons replied, moving beyond the goat's reach. "It's men that can't keep secrets."

"Mebbe so," Mr. Hennessy agreed. He scratched his head more vigorously. His veined face seemed to grow redder under its week's bristle of graying beard.

"Yo' see," he continued, "I got somethin' in the wagon there I want to git yo' to keep for me till I calls for it. Oh, they ain't nothin' wrong about it! But I wouldn't want yo' to tell nobody, not even Rollo, 'cause the boys would kid me to death."

"But what is it?" Mrs. Parsons asked.

"A figger," Mr. Hennessy confided, and unmistakably blushed.

"A what?"

"Figger!"

Mr. Hennessy reached over the side of the wagon, lifted out an object wrapped in gunny sacking, and, after a glance up and down the road, stood it in the grass. He unwound the covering, and disclosed a leather-covered human shape, without arms; taller than himself, but not so large around the middle.

It was mounted on a globular iron base, which permitted it to sway in any direction, yet seemed to keep it from falling. Four steel springs dangled from staples about its waist, and at the end of each was attached a wooden pin about two feet long.

"Yo' see," Mr. Hennessy explained, "it was in one of Uncle Mont's mail order catalogues. I was kind of expectin' a fist fight with Caleb Hadfield at the time, and one night—well, it was one Saturday night,

I reckon—I sent off for it. They give yo' a book with it on the manly art of what they call the self-defense."

He looked down at his stomach, and sighed.

"I mean," he went on, "if the boys see me with this here contraption, I'd jes' have to move plumb out of the county."

"You still want to use it, though?" Mrs. Parsons asked.

"It ain't that," Mr. Hennessy confessed. "I figger, living over to the commissary, I kin git the boys to lookin' over the catalogue, an' maybe wantin' to buy one of these things for fun. If they do, I'll take over the orderin' of it, and jes' ship 'em this one here. Yo' know, Mis' Parsons, this blame thing cost me all of a hundred dollars!"

"Why, certainly, you can leave it here," she consented. "You can put it in the spring house. It's dark in there, and if you stand it in the corner, nobody will ever notice it."

Mr. Hennessy rewrapped the dummy and swung it over his shoulder.

Mrs. Parsons led the way up the path that wound between stumps and boulders around the rocky elbow of a narrow ravine to where, out of sight of the cabin, the hewn log spring house, chinked with clay, rested against the bowldery cliff, in the shade of an overhanging cedar. Three logs bridged the trickle that ran over dark wet rocks from beneath the house, to make its way, in silvery leaps, down the rocky "drain."

Mrs. Parsons pulled open the weather-beaten door, and admitted a triangle of sunshine into the cool, damp darkness of the interior.

"You can put it over there," she said, indicating the corner farthest from the sunken spring, where they kept their butter and eggs. Mr. Hennessy stepped inside.

"I'll jes' push these pegs in to keep him settin' up," he puffed; and, after standing the dummy in the corner, and securing it in an upright position by forcing the pegs into the damp ground with his foot, he rejoined Mrs. Parsons, and they returned down the winding path.

"I hopes to come for that air figger mighty soon, Mis' Parsons." Mr. Hennessy puffed again as he climbed to the driver's seat. "Thank you kindly, ma'am. Git up, mule!"

He wrapped the whip around the lean

gray beast, which broke into a gallop, and the equipage bumped out of sight beyond the bend.

V

MRS. PARSONS went back to her housework. After washing and drying the dinner dishes, she proceeded with the business of pasting newspapers over the walls.

She herself would have preferred the rough logs, thinking that they went with the heavy beams of the ceiling, from which still hung a few dusty strings of peppers and a long twist of tobacco. But the previous tenant had begun the papering, and Rollo had thought it best to complete it.

The flour they had discovered in the kitchen made perfect paste, clinging, sticky, and elastic, and it dried like stone.

She stood on a chair, sopped the walls, then laid the paper on and smoothed it with her hands. It gave her a crick in the neck, and made her arms ache, so when the goat began to *ma-a-a!* she was glad enough to stop work and go to the window to look at him.

She decided that he grew more curious in appearance the longer you looked at him. His mismatched eyes and crumply horns were funny enough; but, in addition, the head, tail, and feet were white, while the black, like a carefully fitted waistcoat, covered his neck and body and legs.

"*Ma-a-a!*" the goat cried, looking up at her.

"Hush!" she answered; made a ball of a bit of paper and threw it at him.

He ate it, looking up at her, and again cried "*Ma-a-a!*"

"You poor thing. You are hungry!" Mrs. Parsons hurried into the kitchen. There was really nothing in the place to eat, except seven biscuits, which she did not like to touch for fear that Rollo might forget to bring home any provisions.

"*Ma-a-a!*" called the goat.

Mrs. Parsons put two of the biscuits on a tin pie plate, so the animal would not have to eat off the ground, and took them out to him.

He made a pleased sound as she approached, and when she put the plate down, he crunched up one of the biscuits promptly, and with evident relish.

Mrs. Parsons couldn't help beginning to like the animal. After all, she thought, it wasn't his fault if one eye was white and the other brown. And there was some-

thing in his studious manner while chewing which reminded her of Rollo.

The goat seemed to have difficulty in chewing down on the second biscuit, and then in opening his mouth after he had chewed. He backed away from the plate, lifted his head, and made curious smacking sounds. Finally, after an effort, he swallowed. Then he coughed.

Mrs. Parsons observed the lump course down the shaggy neck, and when the swallow was over, if the goat hadn't been an animal, she would have thought it had tears in its eyes. At any rate, it was looking at her in a funny way, and wagging its ears, so she stepped out of range.

It began to swallow again, although there was nothing in its mouth; and the next moment it was making perfectly awful sounds, like hiccups. Mrs. Parsons ran into the house and came back with a pan of water, which she set down for the goat in the shade of the dogwood tree.

She was just rising when something struck her. She landed up against the cabin, ten feet away, with one shoulder higher than her head, and an elbow in the tin pan which, somehow, had flown along with her. She climbed painfully to her feet.

The goat, wagging its tail and ears, was looking at her soberly, more in reproach, it would seem, than anger.

"You are a bad, wicked, ungrateful thing!" Mrs. Parsons cried. "And I'm going to punish you!"

She untied the rope from the sapling. When she had taught grammar grades, ten years ago, she made a pupil stand in a corner if he was bad; but there was no way of making a goat stand in a corner.

"You come with me," she commanded, and held it by a horn so that it could not sneak up on her again as she limped up to the spring house.

"Now you get in there," she directed, pulling open the door. "It 'll be dark as pitch when this door is closed. And you can just stay there all night, without any supper."

The heavy plank door swung shut of its own weight, and she turned the wooden button on the outside. She limped back to the cabin, where she rolled up the newspapers, put a cover over the paste, so it would keep, and lay down on the bed, on her side, to compose herself.

She must have fallen asleep, because the

next thing she heard was a footstep on the porch.

"Rollo!" she called.

The footsteps came down the short hall. They sounded strange. Mrs. Parsons sat up, and put her hands over her mouth.

VI

THE visitor's soft black hat was held politely in his hand. His blue flannel shirt and corduroy trousers, thrust into laced leather boots, were creased and stained as if they might have been slept in out of doors.

The top of his right ear had been clipped off. His lean countenance, the glow of a pallor breaking through its bronze, intimated that he was not essentially vicious. But he had a revolver in his hand.

"Excuse me, lady," the man said, in a weak, agreeable voice, meanwhile searching about with his sunken brown eyes. "I didn't aim to skeer yo'." The curly black beard only emphasized the youthfulness of his face.

"Been watchin' this here place, an' figured I could drap in about now an' git yo' to give me a snack." He laughed without mirth. "Time was when I was mighty particular 'bout what I et; but after feedin' on huckleberries an' wintergreen for nigh a week, you kin jes' dish me what you got."

"Y-yes, sir," Mrs. Parsons agreed. "There's nothing in the house, sir, except a few biscuits."

The visitor's eyes hardened.

"Don't yo' lie to me, lady!" he commanded sharply. "I'm a easy man, mostly, but I cain't afford jes' now to stan' for no projeckin'."

"That's the honest truth," Mrs. Parsons said. "Mr. Parsons is going to bring home some things, if you want to wait."

"No, thank yo'," the visitor replied, ironically.

"There's some gravy," Mrs. Parsons added. "I forgot that."

"Put it all in a can an' give it to me, quick," the gentleman directed. "That air husban' of yo'r'n may come in, and start somethin', an' I don't want to kill no mo' people."

"No, ma'am," he added, sighing as he followed Mrs. Parsons to the kitchen. "That little diffunce I had las' week sho' has made me peaceable. I reckon a feller's got to kill his man befo' he comes to recog-

nize how plumb comfortable it is to be a law-abidin' citizen."

"Yes, sir," Mrs. Parsons agreed, politely but hurriedly.

Her hands were trembling so, at the thought of Rollo's ever being shot, that she could hardly shake the biscuits out of the bread box into the small tin bucket. She winced as the outlaw reached casually over her shoulder and took up a biscuit.

He dragged it through the cold gravy in a plate on the back of the stove, and with two bites filled his mouth.

"Gimme another biscuit," he directed, "an' scrape the rest of this here gravy right into that bucket."

He was reaching for a third biscuit, when a battering sound fell upon them from a short distance up the hill.

"What's that?" the man demanded, his voice suddenly taut and harsh.

"It's only a goat," Mrs. Parsons explained, following him as he stepped swiftly to the main room window. "Mr. Hennesy left him here, and I put him in the spring house. I guess he's trying to butt his way out."

"Yo' better be tellin' me the truth," the visitor stated. He hiccuped slightly, as he rested his gun hand on the window sill. "If a man comes down that path, I'm goin' to pot him befo' he gets to that there persimmon tree, as sho' as God made little apples."

Mrs. Parsons, fortunately for her peace of mind, did not know that the noise at the spring house was caused by Rollo. He had left his ledgers a little earlier than usual, and in an affronted mood. The men at the office had stolen and hidden his gun; he had found it at last in the waste paper basket.

"I don't mind a joke," Rollo had told himself as he followed his twenty-foot shadow along the dusty road. "But they think I'm a city fool, and haven't got any business with a gun."

The sun slid behind the mountain, and he came to a dip in the road where the tree branches met overhead, making a quiet tunnel, damp and dim. His footsteps, plopping into the dew-crusted road, echoed uncomfortably loud.

Things were moving in the undergrowth, birds, most likely; but the dampness had fogged his spectacles, and a man might creep down the hill to the edge of the road,

and he could neither see nor hear him. A twig crackled on the hillside.

Rollo bent his narrow frame and set out on a limping gallop. The flour bag leaped up with each step to whiten a flaring ear, and dropped to the sharp shoulder with an impact that sent out a puff of white. The paper bags of eggs, potatoes, and butter, rustled like a hundred "*Ps-s-sts!*" from the shadowy forest, challenging him to halt.

Around a sudden turn the hewn logs of the cabin, pale and golden in the afterglow of evening, looked very homelike and comforting. Rollo's freckled countenance was bathed in perspiration as he slowed to a walk and turned into the short cut that led through the dewy sumac bushes and up over the cliff to the spring house.

He could save distance by taking the eggs and the butter up to the spring, and continuing to the cabin by the path that led down the ravine.

The dense leafy saplings dimmed the fading brilliance of evening to a gleaming and uncertain dusk. Rollo scrambled over the back of the cliff and slid down a shale path to the little bridge of logs.

As he lifted his crowded arms to unlatch the wooden button of the spring house, he thought he heard a sound inside the weather-beaten door.

He laid down his bundles and took out his gun. The spring house, it occurred to him, would be an ideal place for the outlaw to hide if he had planned a descent upon the cabin in the night. Mrs. Parsons might have been strolling by and innocently have turned the button.

He snapped open the revolver to make sure that it was loaded, and discovered, with a chilly shock, that its chambers were empty.

"This is absurd," Rollo said to himself, shakily. "There can't possibly be any one in there. The door is buttoned shut."

VII

HE took the eggs and butter in his left hand, and drew the door open with his right. A triangle of lesser gloom revealed the almost invisible silver of the spring in the farthest corner.

"I've got to clean out that spring again," he thought, detecting an unusual odor.

The soft earthen floor was lower than he had calculated; he was jolted as he stepped down, and to catch his balance, released the door, which swung shut. He knew the

way to the spring, however, and crossed to it gingerly in the darkness; knelt and lowered the eggs and the butter into the tin bucket whose top arose above the level of the icy water.

He was on the point of picking out four eggs for supper, when something hit him from the rear.

Partly dazed by his impact against the log wall, Rollo scrambled up with a muffled squawk. It flashed through his mind that it would have been better to die of organic complications in Cincinnati.

All was dark and silent. One of his feet was in the icy water, but he feared to move it. He waited, holding his breath.

Suddenly, the chill from the spring ran up to his scalp. There was the sound of a step. It was near the wall. It was coming closer.

Rollo's throat dried; he swallowed with a *click*. Cautiously he drew forth his foot for a dash toward the door; leaped, and slipped on a mossy rock; arose and leaped again, to meet in mid-air a body across his knees.

He pitched over it and fell flat, and scrambled upward with a stifled shout in time to be struck heavily again from the rear. A headlong stumble across the floor landed him full tilt against the yielding body of a standing man.

In the terror of desperation, Rollo grappled. They fell against the wall together. Rollo twisted his adversary, trying to throw him, but met with a springy resistance, as if the man held to a yielding board.

Rollo was struck again from behind, below the knees. He felt the man's coat come off as he himself slipped down. With a wild effort, he forced himself up, grappled the figure afresh about the shoulders, and sank his teeth in the neck.

They fell together, Rollo twisting on top while holding his grip. The man lay still beneath him.

Then came the welcome sound of a hammering at the spring house door. There was a heavy blow, twice, three times, repeated, and it was accompanied by a horny scratching.

The door yielded. Without relinquishing his grip with arms and teeth, Rollo rolled his eyes upward.

In the doorway, beard and horns outlined against a lattice of branches and the blue evening sky, stood Mr. Hennessy's goat.

Rollo recalled a bouncing body, on the bed of a wagon, obscured by a dancing goat. He cautiously removed his teeth from the prostrate figure's neck. There was no movement.

He loosened his embrace of the body, and brought his hand up past the bulge of the chest. Then he gave a cry of horror and pushed himself sharply away.

The figure, cold and motionless, had no arms.

Rollo's fingers trembled so that he could scarcely light a match. At last, however, the yellow glow spread to reveal a buxom, leather-covered chest, four dependent springs and uprooted stakes, and on the leather neck a neatly clipped oval hole, the size of a bite, through which showed cotton inside.

Mr. Parsons drew a quivering sigh. He brushed off his clothes, washed his hands at the spring, keeping a wary eye on the goat, then picked out four eggs, cut off a pat of butter, went out, closed and latched the spring house door, took up again the flour and potatoes, and, after chasing the goat into the ravine, started off down the winding path.

The cabin, coming suddenly into view around a shoulder of the cliff, looked very sweet and homelike, still palely gilded by the afterglow which lay on the western sky like a veil of dusk and amber.

Rollo missed the waiting face of Mrs. Parsons at the window, but remembered that he had started out from the office today a little earlier.

Nearing home and wife, he began to feel strong and dangerous, as befits a man who has faced the threat of violent death, and emerged victorious.

He would chide her for leaving a goat in the spring house, he decided, but would say nothing about the battle with the leather figure, nor about being butted. A woman wouldn't understand things like that.

Mr. Parsons's bodkinlike figure was erect, the thin chest expanded, the small head at an arrogant tilt, with the retreating chin thrust forward, as he reached his house and castle.

VIII

"HONEY!" he called. There was no answer. "In the kitchen," he concluded.

As he strode down the brief hall toward the living room, Mr. Parsons dreamed a dream. In his youth he had visions of be-

ing a knight in shining armor, wooing with brave deeds a beauteous princess.

But this present dream, he felt, was different. It was in keeping with life.

It showed Mr. Rollo Parsons marching into his own log cabin castle, chest expanded, head erect, holding in his extended hand a five-hundred-dollar bill.

The dialogue would run thus:

"How did you get that?"

"I captured the outlaw, single-handed."

"Oh, Rollo! You are wonderful!"

This vision and this imaginary conversation were dissolved abruptly by the sight that met Mr. Parsons as he stepped into the living room.

Mrs. Parsons, her brown eyes very prominent against the unusual pallor and tenseness of her plump countenance, was seated in a chair with her back to the pine-board table, staring with the fixity of fear at a figure reclining on the bed against the wall.

And the sight of the gentleman on the bed might have made a braver man than Rollo Parsons pause. A blue flannel blouse had taken the place of the high V collar of the handbill.

But there was no mistaking the way the hair was parted. The ear, just visible above the pillow, was clipped off at the top.

Mr. Parsons, a little dazed, noticed next that the outlaw's skin was a sickly green; that his eyes were half closed and listless. His hands were pressed over his stomach, so that the revolver was unguarded where it lay on a red patch of the crazy quilt.

Rollo dropped the flour and the potatoes, the butter and the eggs, and sprang for the gun.

A rolling potato had preceded him, however, and Rollo's fall jolted the glass lamp, a wedding present, off the side table as he landed on the rear of his hips at the outlaw's side.

But he grabbed the gun. And, sliding easily away on the seat of his trousers, he pointed the weapon at the outlaw's head.

"Hold up your hands, Mr. Izzard," he commanded, "or I shoot to kill!"

The outlaw rolled heavy-lidded and sunken brown eyes reproachfully upon Mrs. Parsons, then carelessly upon her husband, seated on the floor.

"I wish to God yo' would!" he murmured, and closed his eyes.

You can't shoot a man who acts like

that. Mr. Parsons climbed up stiffly, still pointing the gun at the uncaring captive.

He was wondering what to do next, when, to the accompaniment of a great clumping of feet in the hall, there appeared the squat and perspiring figure of Mr. Hennessy, bearing in his arms the leather dummy of the spring house.

"Say, Mrs. Parsons," he was chuckling, "I got Wade Damron to say he'll buy this here thing. Say, Rollo, what the—"

Mr. Hennessy stood with his stubbly jaw hanging open, his bleary eyes protruding bluely from his veined red face.

"Well, I'm a son of a gun!" he remarked, sincerely. "And Rollo the one who kotched him! Well, I'm a son of a gun!"

Mr. Hennessy became so interested in the fact that he was a son of a gun, he displayed no curiosity at all as to how the capture had been effected. He carried the dummy out to the waiting wagon, returned as one in a dream, and carried Mr. Izzard out, too, murmuring puffily at intervals that he, Michael Hennessy, was certainly a son of a gun.

In fact, it was not until, climbing puffily up to the springless seat, he leaned to examine for a moment the neck of the leather dummy that he varied his refrain.

"Dern that goat!" he remarked, and cracked the whip.

IX

THE husband and wife watched the wagon until the green, cadaverous countenance of the outlaw and his reproachful eyes had faded into the dusk of the road. Then Rollo returned to the living room, picked up the bag of flour, and took it into the kitchen.

On the shelf stood an old paper bag, containing the grayish flour they had inherited. Rollo noticed, as he rolled the bag up, that it had straggling pencil letters on the bottom. They meant nothing to him—WALPAPER PAIST.

He carried the paper ball out to the goat, who was pensively chewing a cud under the dogwood tree.

The goat nuzzled the bag suspiciously.

Rollo stooped to lace his boot, and received a butt that drove him headforemost up onto the cabin porch. Mr. Parsons climbed to his feet, and, rubbing his shin, looked at the animal.

The thin chest was swelled like a filbert

on a bodkin as Mr. Parsons approached his helpmeet, who was setting the table.

"It's a good thing I came in," he remarked in a deep voice. "This sort of thing's a man's work. If I hadn't come along—" He let some terrible catastrophe go undescribed.

Mrs. Parsons dropped a fork and threw her arms about him.

"Oh, Rollo! What would I do without you? You are wonderful!" She stood off and looked up at him, a light of pride illuminating her tears. "I bet the men at the

camp will be proud of you, too, to-morrow. Catching that outlaw single-handed."

Rollo picked up the paper potato bag and began thoughtfully to rub butter off the seat of his khaki trousers. He paused and looked at his wife over the horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Well, yes, they will," he agreed.

Pleased anticipation brightened his freckled face, but he spoke with manly reluctance and deliberation.

"Well, yes honey," he repeated, "I imagine they will."

The Good Knight

THE TRADITION OF A LONG VANISHED HERO LIVES AGAIN IN
THE HEART OF THIS FRENCH-CANADIAN YOUTH

By William Merriam Rouse

IT was unusual to find a girl so far back in the Laurentians, miles beyond the old parishes and the sound of the Angelus.

It was more than unusual to find a girl such as this one whom Antoine Paquet saw, standing upon the top of a snow-covered ridge, and smiling down at him—a girl with a little face like a white flower above the fur collar of her *capote*, and great, dark blue eyes in which little jokes played hide and seek.

Sometimes choppers brought their wives into the stillness of the mountains, but none of those women were like this one. Here was a girl, a child, a miracle of *le bon Dieu*.

Now, Antoine was not in any way proud of himself, for he had the simple heart of a man who lives with trees eight or nine months of the year. He might well have been a little vain of his slender, compact body, along which the muscles stretched and curled under a satin skin. He might even have rejoiced in the gray-green calm of his wide eyes.

It did not occur to him that it might be because of his eyes that the girl stayed there, and smiled, and waited for him to drive his snowshoes up the steep slope.

"*Mademoiselle!*" he exclaimed, and he pulled off his woolen *toque* and kept it off at the risk of freezing his ears. "I came out of camp looking for a rabbit, and, behold, I find an angel of the snows!"

She laughed, and the light in her blue eyes warmed a little, as though what fear she might have had of a stranger had vanished at closer view of Antoine Paquet.

"And I came north seeking a man whom I have no reason to love—and I find a poet!"

The compliment was blurred in the mind of Antoine by the inference, which he somehow drew, that she was alone. It was strange to meet a girl like her in the bush; so young, and wearing clothes which indicated that she must be at least the daughter of a mayor or a notary.

But it was astounding that this small armful of beauty should be traveling alone. It could not be true.

"You do not mean to tell me," Paquet cried, "that you have no father with you? Or brother?"

"I did not tell you that," she smiled; "but it is true. Neither father nor—husband!"

"Poof!" Antoine exclaimed. "Hus-

band! Child, you are not old enough to have a husband! Nor to be away from home, alone! Have you marched from the St. Lawrence, sleeping in choppers' camps? *Mon Dieu!* You could not make camp in the snow, you! And there are not half a dozen *chantiers* between here and St. Joachim with women in them!"

"I can make camp in the snow, me!" she mocked. "Also, there is many a *bûcheron* who has the good heart! Who are you to talk like that? Very likely you are a chopper, yourself, if the truth were known!"

The soul of Antoine Paquet began to melt toward this small girl, who stood with her feet planted firmly in the snow, and told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself.

But he reminded himself that she was small, and without doubt very young; and that he must take care of her, if she would let him.

"It is true that I am a chopper in a three-man *chantier*," he said. "Our camp is about three hours' march from here, and my name is Antoine Paquet."

"And, also, you will not get any fresh meat for camp by talking to me, M. Paquet," she remarked. "If you'll answer one question, I won't keep you from the rabbits any longer. Do you know a man called Théodore Phaneuf?"

II

For several seconds Paquet remained silent, staring at her, while through his mind went many thoughts with the speed of bullets.

Théodore Phaneuf he knew much better than he cared to know him. Had he not worked under the orders of that one for long months, lived in the same *cabane*, eaten from the same kettle of beans? He liked Phaneuf much less than he liked an evil tempered lynx.

It was in particular the nose of the man that was objectionable to Antoine. He did not mind a large nose, a very mountain of a nose; nor a short and insignificant and abashed nose.

There were red noses in the woods, and noses purple, either from whisky *blanc* or the cold. All these Paquet accepted as being either the misfortune or the ornament of the men who owned them; but he was barely able to tolerate the nose of this Théodore Phaneuf.

It was long, thin, and pointed; one of those noses which seem to have been designed for the purpose of slicing into the affairs of other people. It was a nose that quivered at the sound of clinking money or the sight of a pretty girl, without regard to her standing.

Théodore was held to be a good-looking man, and certainly he was tall and strong; but Antoine Paquet hated his nose.

"I know this man," Paquet replied, in a low voice, and after such a long time that she grew impatient. "He is boss of my *chantier*."

"And your face tells me that you do not like him," the girl declared. "*Bien!* I will tell you my name. I am Héloïse Godbout, of Ste. Anne de Beaupré, and I have business with Théodore Phaneuf."

Neither from her expression nor from the tone of her voice was Antoine able to guess the nature of her business with Phaneuf. Her words indicated that she was not altogether pleased with Théodore, but her feeling might be nothing more than—

Could it be that the child was infatuated with Phaneuf? Bad things were said of him in the towns where he was known.

"You want to talk with him?" Antoine asked.

"I want to, and I am going to!" she replied, defiantly, as though she had read his thought.

"I cannot prevent you by force," Paquet said, with a sinking heart; "but I will try to protect you. You do not realize, *mon enfant*, that you are alone in the wilderness of Quebec. There are three of us in our camp. Phaneuf, Sévère Garneau, and myself—and no women. Garneau is as rough a *bûcheron* as there is in the north, and Phaneuf is capable of all evil. Now will you turn and go back to Ste. Anne de Beaupré?"

"And you, I suppose, are a saint!" she exclaimed. "*Bon Dieu!* Inevitably, men are the same! All others are evil, but they themselves are ready for heaven! Will you take me to this camp of yours, or must I follow your trail?"

"You are too young to have the wisdom you pretend," Antoine answered, with a sigh. "I shall take you to camp with me, and, if need be, stick my knife between the ribs of Théodore."

"Perhaps I shall not ask for any help, M. Paquet," she said. "I have a little silk

tent behind this ridge, and if you'll wait until I get that, and make up my pack, I won't make you any more trouble. At least Théodore Phaneuf is gay! One can say that for him!"

Crestfallen, Paquet followed her for a few hundred yards, and did what little her quick hands allowed him in breaking camp.

She had been traveling light, with only the tent, a rifle, blankets, and the fewest possible utensils for cooking. The pack was so light that even her small form was able to carry it easily, with shoulders straight and unwearied.

Antoine, by no means a big man, looked down upon the top of her head and wondered that she was able to march with such wiry strength, to swing a hand ax, to spend nights alone under the cold stars, with branches cracking in the frost, and the fire dying to embers before dawn. Surely her parents must have been of the bush or she could not do these things!

The little jokes which played hide and seek in the eyes of Héloïse Godbout had gone away during her conversation with Antoine, and they did not come back as the two marched toward the *chantier* Phaneuf.

She asked some questions, as a man might have asked them, about the winter's chopping, but she gave no hint of her own affairs, and neither voice nor eyes warmed again for Antoine Paquet. It was slightly ridiculous, this grown-up manner which she assumed because Paquet had taken it upon himself to give her advice.

Marching beside her, he knew a great heaviness of heart. Here was a girl who, when she grew to the stature of womanhood, would be close to the picture Antoine had carried in his heart since he had begun to think about women at all.

He had not known, of course, that the picture had deep blue eyes, and cloudy black hair waving down against cheeks of roses and milk. But now that he saw the picture, he recognized it. Naturally.

And what could one do except try to take her home to her family. Without doubt, she was too young to know her own mind. Yet she was running into danger. It must be that she had run away from home.

III

THE steady, even thud of axes came to them before they drew in sight of the small

log building that was the *chantier* Phaneuf. Here were stumps, and trampled snow strewn with branches; long ranks of wood, cut and ready for the sleds to draw it south to the towns. Just as they came out of the woods, into the little clearing about the *cabane*, Paquet gave his last advice.

"If you want to talk alone with Phaneuf," he said, "do not go so far that I cannot hear you call—and take your rifle!"

"I shall take care of myself, *monsieur!*" she shrugged. "To hear you talk, one would think that I was a child with a little morsel of cake, and Théodore Phaneuf a hungry sled dog! It is I who am about to take the morsel of cake from him! You are stupid! A prig! A fool! Why does *le bon Dieu* make these men with good shoulders and the eyes of archangels—and the hearts of sheep? Bah! Go away! Walk behind me! They will think I have been flirting with you, and your reputation will be ruined! *Dieu, seigneurs*, what a man!"

Antoine tripped over his own snowshoes, a thing he had not done in a dozen years. He was so dazed by her outburst that he did, indeed, fall behind, and he was half a dozen paces in the rear when she walked up to the door of the *cabane*, carelessly kicked off her snowshoes, and stepped boldly indoors.

In a moment Paquet had followed; and while his heart thumped a score of times, he stood as still as the girl, as motionless as Sévère Garneau, and waited for the next move in her dangerous game.

Evidently Garneau had come in hastily for a fresh supply of tobacco, just before they reached the camp, for there had been the sound of two axes, and here was one of the choppers. He faced around from the shelf where the supplies were kept, with his broad jaw hanging, and the glitter of surprise in his small eyes.

Sévère was a thick-bodied man, without much imagination. At least Paquet did not actively dislike him, for his faults were obvious and unashamed.

Slowly the lower jaw of Garneau resumed its natural place, and a grin full of meaning stretched his mouth halfway to his ears. He finished filling his pipe, and swaggered a little as he stepped toward Héloïse.

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle!* I wish it had been my turn to go hunting to-day!"

"Shut up!" Antoine snapped. "Mlle. Godbout is here on business of her own!"

"Don't be stingy—" Garneau began; but Héloïse cut in with a voice as withering as a blizzard.

"My business is with neither of you! It concerns M. Théodore Phaneuf."

"Ho!" Sévère roared. "So that's why St. Antoine is so surly! Go find him, *ma petite*! You can locate him by the sound of his ax. And I'll be a good fellow and stay here with Paquet."

She turned and brushed past Antoine, her face marble white. Paquet put out a hand to stop her.

"Don't go alone!" he pleaded. "At least let me follow you to see that no evil—"

"Be still!" she flared. "I will deal with Phaneuf as I see fit! He is a man with blood in his veins! I can say that much for him!"

She was gone, with the door banging behind her. Paquet groaned, and sat down upon a wooden bench.

He stared about the interior of the *cabane*, with sudden loathing. It was littered, and none too clean, except for his own bunk and the few pots and tin dishes.

These he himself washed every day, contrary to the general custom. It was considered a great folly by Garneau, and a matter of indifference by Phaneuf.

A wave of discouragement settled upon Antoine Paquet, like the dark blanket of a mighty storm. Of what use were any of the things for which he had struggled? If the child would not have his protection—

He was so plunged into despair that even Sévère Garneau seemed human, and the leash was cast off from his tongue for the first time that winter.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he groaned. "Look, Garneau! This child— She has gone alone to see Phaneuf, Heaven alone knows what for. I find her traveling alone, looking for him."

"Child?" Sévère echoed, with a whoop of laughter. "My friend, you are truly a fool! Always I have thought so, and now I know it! Child? She is twenty; perhaps twenty-five! She is small, and you think she is a child! *Sacré!* She is one of those little women who never grow old, and I would give my winter's wages if she would smile just once at me! What business do you suppose she has with Théodore? *Dieu!* Is it not plain? She scorns

you and me, and goes alone to see him! She knows Théodore! *Bien!* In that case she would not go to see him alone, unless this were a love affair!"

IV

EVERY word of that laughing outburst wrote itself upon the heart of Antoine Paquet; burned itself there.

Suddenly he realized that Héloïse was, indeed, a woman; that was why his heart had leaped to meet her as he scrambled up the ridge. Yes, and she had responded until he began to act like a grandfather.

It might be true that she had a love affair with Théodore Phaneuf; but if this were true, it did not alter the fact that Antoine had had his chance to edge in ahead of Phaneuf. He had given it up. For what? For nothing!

"Thou art right, Sévère," he agreed, dully. "I have always been a fool."

"But why?" Garneau asked, curiously, and almost with a trace of pity in his voice. "You are strong, and good looking! If a man finds a pretty girl in the woods—"

"It is because I am a fool, and thought she was a child," Paquet said.

"What difference?" Garneau shrugged. "Some one would have to make love to her, sooner or later!"

"It is because I am a fool," Antoine repeated, monotonously. "I have read some books, and it is a bad thing to read books. There was once a knight—"

His voice died, but Garneau waited, with his pipe poised, and a look of interest growing in his small, bright eyes.

"What is that?" he asked. "A knight?"

"A man who was called 'Sir,'" Paquet explained. "Like the great Sir Wilfrid Laurier, except that in the old days they wore armor of steel, and carried swords, and they fought a great deal."

"But what has that got to do with this little lump of sugar that you found growing in the bush—and threw away?"

Antoine felt himself growing hot about the ears. Here was something of which he had never before spoken, and he was telling it to the thick-headed Sévère Garneau.

"It is nothing," he said, uncomfortably. "Only that many hundred years ago there was a knight who lived in France. His name was Bayard, but they called him 'the good knight, without fear and without reproach.' I have read about him."

"Still I do not comprehend! Is it that

he was a fighting man, and did not like to kiss a pretty girl? That would be like the miracles at the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré. Me, I do not believe in them at all."

"Naturally he kissed many girls," Antoine answered; "but he protected the weak. It was honor. And that was why they called him 'without reproach.' Do you understand?"

"And you are trying to be like this fellow?" Garneau staggered to his bunk and rolled upon it, doubled up with laughter. "I am sorry for you, my friend! You and he have missed a lot of fun! When somebody stuck a sword through him, where was his honor then?"

"I don't know," Paquet murmured, with his head hanging. "It was—somewhere."

"It was nowhere!" Garneau grunted. Suddenly he sat up, listening. "Hark! They are coming, and they have made it up, by the sound of their voices. Child! It is to laugh, Antoine!"

The door of the *cabane* opened, and Héloïse Godbout came in quickly. Her cheeks were flushed, and there was a sparkle in her eyes, although it was not quite the same kindly warmth which Paquet had seen in them when he first met her.

Behind her came Théodore Phaneuf, with an arrogant swing to his shoulders, and a slight smile curling the mustache of which he was so proud. He was a man much taller and broader than Paquet, but not so closely knit.

Phaneuf had curling black hair, which gleamed as if it had been oiled, and in many a village along the Côte de Beaupré he was considered a handsome man, although there were few who did not admit that they feared and distrusted him.

He made friends and lost them; he had sweethearts and dropped them. It did not matter to him if there were tears; or if some man added another to his collection of knife scars.

Héloïse was no sooner in the room than she faced about, sweeping Garneau and Paquet with a smile. She backed toward the rusty stove, looking up into the face of Phaneuf.

He winked at the other men, and stood with his smile broadening slowly. It was apparent that he was enjoying some joke which Héloïse Godbout might or might not share.

"Now!" she exclaimed. "Will you say it before them? I do not know about this other man, but I am sure that M. Paquet, who should have been a priest, can be trusted!"

"Little angel," Phaneuf grinned. "I am quite sure that you are a little devil instead of a little angel, and I do not trust you any more than you trust me! So, when you keep your promise, I will keep mine! And I am not very patient, although I know I am grinning at you like a cat at a bowl of cream!"

Suddenly the light died out of the face of Héloïse Godbout. It was as though the realization of defeat had come upon her all in a moment; whatever her purpose, she was beaten.

Paquet knew, for out of her eyes looked the same despair he had felt such a short time before. She turned to him and Garneau, and swept her small hands out in a gesture of failure.

"*Messieurs!*" she cried, brokenly. "It is useless! I promised him nothing, but I did try to deceive him—to trick him. This scoundrel! But, perhaps, it is never right to fight the devil with fire. Listen to me! My father was killed last year. He was a man great in goodness, and also great in folly. He trusted every one!"

"Ah!" Paquet remarked, in a tone of anticipation.

"Yes, even this Théodore Phaneuf! From him this Phaneuf borrowed two thousand dollars, nearly all my father had. He took the money, and was to bring a note, with the names of other men written on it to make it good. But my father was killed while he was cutting ice with his gang of men, and now M. Phaneuf says he never had the money! With my own eyes I saw it given to him!"

"Ho!" Garneau observed, having been told the facts.

"If I could get him to admit that debt before witnesses, he would have to pay it! It was my last hope to find him and try to cajole him! You see, *messieurs!* I have failed! *Mon Dieu!* I ask you again, M. Théodore Phaneuf! And I desire a truthful answer. Do you owe me two thousand dollars?"

"Not a cent!" Phaneuf laughed. "Not yet!"

Silence ensued for a long moment, and then from the bunk of Garneau there came a muttered exclamation.

"Name of a dog! I was a little bit wrong, after all!"

V

THROUGH it all, Antoine Paquet had kept silent, but a great gladness had filled his heart, like sunrise. Now he became conscious of a grim tension that drew his fingers together, and made him think of the knife in his belt. For there was a look which he did not like settling about the mouth of Théodore Phaneuf.

"I shall go!" Héloïse said, in a low voice. "I have failed."

Phaneuf drew a deep breath, and his shoulders moved jerkily. He took a step backward, standing so that he commanded the door.

"Wrong, *mademoiselle!*" he half whispered. "You have not failed—not yet! *And you are not going!*"

For the first time since he had met her in the bush, Paquet saw fear come into the eyes of the girl.

She looked around, a little wildly, but there was no escape for her from that place. There was the door, and there were two small windows with grimy glass in them, but while Théodore Phaneuf stood upon his feet she was a prisoner.

Her glance swung to Garneau, and found no comfort. It went to the face of Antoine, and there it rested while she stood waiting, with parted lips, for whatever the next moment might bring.

"Get out, both of you!" Phaneuf ordered, thickly. "You, Paquet! And Garneau! Go back to the chopping, or anywhere you like! But get out!"

Antoine Paquet took swift inventory of that room. The heavy rifle that belonged to the camp and the light weapon of the girl stood in a corner from which he and Phaneuf were about equally distant; and they were at the end of the *cabane*, opposite to the bunk where Garneau sat. Hence they were not to be considered as an advantage to any one.

Each man wore at his belt a stout knife, used for everything, from eating at table to skinning a deer; and it was upon his knife that Antoine knew he must depend if the boss pressed this affair to the end.

"*Sacré!*" Garneau muttered, stirring uneasily. "Look here, you two! I am not such a fool as to get my skin slit for a woman, and if there is going to be a fight, I will have nothing to do with it! But I

will not get out, Théodore, unless Antoine goes. I have not seen a good fight for three years; since I was in one of the great camps at Chicoutimi!"

Phaneuf swallowed; a greenish light came into his eyes. Paquet saw his hand settle upon the handle of his knife. It was clear that any hesitation the boss might have felt had left him at the declaration of neutrality from Sévère Garneau. He had but one man to deal with, and that one of smaller stature than himself.

The fingers of Héloïse Godbout locked and twisted against each other, and never for an instant did she take her gaze from the face of Antoine. He felt that look, even while he watched every faintest movement of the body of Phaneuf, and from it took a degree of comfort. She was a little glad, perhaps, that there was a fool like him who would at least try to stand between her and danger.

The knife of Antoine was out and on guard, point upward, a little in advance of his body. He stood easily, waiting, for he had no desire to attack.

If Phaneuf would think better of it, and let the girl go—

It might be that he would, for he was standing still, as though undecided, now, and the attack which had seemed so imminent half a minute before did not come.

"It is folly to fight, Théodore," Paquet said. "Let her go in peace!"

Afterward Antoine knew that this moment of softness on his part was just what Phaneuf had been waiting for. Because the words had hardly been spoken, when the boss leaped, not toward Paquet, but with his knife point aimed at the throat of Héloïse.

She cried out, and Antoine, taken utterly by surprise, sprang to save her. Then Phaneuf, having diverted Antoine from all thought of guarding himself, wheeled with a malevolent grin drawing back that mustache which was his pride.

VI

HE threw his knife across a distance of no more than six feet, and, by all the laws of time and space, it should have buried itself to the hilt in the throat of Antoine Paquet.

There are times when things do not happen as they should, according to the calculations of men; and some say it is the goodness of *le bon Dieu*, and some say it

is luck. Ever so little the moccasin of Théodore Phaneuf slipped upon the grease-spattered planks of that floor; and the easily moving muscles of Antoine, which were so beautifully made, took his head a little to one side with a swiftness which was swifter than the hand of his enemy.

A burning point drew a line along the side of his neck, and from the log wall behind came a faint thud, as the knife struck there. Fear chased amazement out of the face of Phaneuf; and slowly he began to move backward, watchfully, toward the corner where the rifles stood. And all this took place while the cry from the lips of Héloïse Godbout was still ringing in the ears of Antoine.

"Slit him!" Garneau yelled, hoarse with excitement. "You've got him, Paquet!"

It was true that Phaneuf was completely at the mercy of Paquet; a spring forward, a feint, a lunge, and the boss would be out of the fight, and perhaps out of the living world.

Antoine took one step, and then it seemed as though an invisible hand pressed upon his heart. That good knight of whom he had read withheld his steel from the breast of all helpless foes.

It was folly, of course, as all the world knew. In every fight in the woods, boot heels were for the man who went down. Garneau was cursing, and the seconds were dripping away, while Phaneuf backed nearer and nearer to the rifles.

And, because of that good knight without fear and without reproach, Antoine

Paquet, woodchopper of Quebec, could not leap and drive his knife home.

It seemed long, but it was not more than five seconds before the break came. With a deep throated growl, Antoine flung his knife away and ran in upon Phaneuf with the shifting, lightning attack of a terrier.

He danced around the big boss, made as if to close with him, avoided the clutching arms, caught a kick upon his hip, and laughed. Phaneuf began to curse, frantic with rage, and then Antoine knew that his moment had come.

He ran under a mighty blow, and, with a hiplock, sent the head and shoulders of Théodore Phaneuf driving into a corner.

The solid little *cabane* trembled. A gasp came from Héloïse; a curse of sheer astonishment from Garneau. Phaneuf lay where he had fallen, a heap of rumpled clothing.

Antoine filled his lungs and lifted his head. He met the eyes of Héloïse, and in them found a new quality; a look that shone upon him through tears as the sun shines through a summer shower.

"Crazy!" Garneau muttered. "And a fool for luck!"

"*Mademoiselle* knows that I am crazy," Antoine said, with a faint smile. "But, now that I know she is not a child, I shall no longer have the heart of a sheep!"

Bright pennons were flaming in the cheeks of Héloïse Godbout; stars were in her eyes. A little smile flirted with her lips.

"The heart of a lion!" she said.

OLD STUFF

Old stuff, they say, the newest songs are wrought of
And critics tire of threadbare classic themes—
Roses and birds and eyes and golden hair
And silver moons. Ah, take all if you dare,
Take all the lovely things you ever thought of
But leave the moon.

What, though, when comes my radiant day of loving,
The rose is dead and all the birds are south?
That can be borne if love may bear its flower
Within the glamour of a moonlit hour.
Old time accessories enhance love's proving—
Leave me the moon.

Choose me no orchid, exotically showy,
Hunt no strange hour, no unaccustomed scene;
No modern I, starved for unhackneyed fare.
Give me a rosebush flowering or bare;
Save me a garden path dew-mossed or snowy;
Leave me the moon.

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

Pearls Before Swine

THE STORY OF AN OUTLANDER IN THE REALM OF THE ELECT,
AND HOW HE MADE HIMSELF BELONG

By Hubbard Hutchinson

I WAS spending the winter in the half-forgotten island of Jamaica, where the past stares wistfully from old, fine crumbling walls of planters' deserted houses, where the negroes live in coconut-thatched huts, simple as those in Africa, and where all things move, if at all, in a slow-tuned gentle rhythm under thick, yellow sunshine.

My successive withdrawals from the dusty capital and a malarial seaside had finally left me on a lonely mountain top, where the sun, far beyond a maplike plain, sank into the high horizon of the sea, and arose across dark mountains of tumbled mist and purple.

I could see other distant plaster houses, isolated as our own, the minute pattern of their tanks and fence walls, the steep threads of their roads curving red scratches across the wooded hillsides.

My lodging sprawled over a bare hilltop; a rambling farmhouse of rooms so high and huge they seemed empty; their furniture native mahogany chairs and washstands. Soft-footed negroes in plaid head-dress and brass earrings, brought me enormous, flame-colored tangerines at dawn, and lit my oil lamp at dusk.

It was a place where our hostess sat at the head of her long table and dispensed food. About the yard frolicked a family of pups; chickens roosted in the glistening dark leaves of the pimento trees; long-horned Indian cattle browsed under the leaning towers of spiky Spanish bayonets, and a hopeful pig stood all day in somnolent expectancy underneath a coconut palm.

One felt that change could never climb these mountains. The houses which topped them, like my own lodging, would go on and on, the purple bougainvillea growing

higher against mellowing plaster, and stones slipping occasionally from the thick-topped walls where the lizards sunned and flickered all day, until house and rampart were imperceptibly absorbed again into the land from which they arose.

Our isolation naturally established an easy intimacy among the few guests, and soon after their arrival I found myself chatting with Natalie Crewes and her brother, as if I had crossed the sea with them in a small ship. I had discovered Natalie bending rapidly above a chair in the big living room.

At my step she had whirled, and raised a vivid dark face under a tight little motoring hat.

"What a lovely thing!" she exclaimed, in a swift, eager voice. "It can't be a genuine Sheraton—do you think?"

The Crewes brought great life to our hilltop. Olin was an artist; Natalie an interior decorator.

They had sought the mountains, like myself, to avoid malaria, and they came with a suit case of books and sketching blocks. They talked a great deal, and very well.

The dinner table conversations, which I am afraid had pursued a peaceful and unstimulating course among the shallows of hunting and politics, began to froth and swirl. Picabia and Cezanne, the shortcomings of Inigo Jones, and the polytonality of Stravinski, flew back and forth across roast yampies and curried fowl.

We lived in an excitement of ideas, and presently the two other guests, Englishmen off on a holiday, began cautiously to emerge from their shells, and contributed the clarity of Cambridge training to our sometimes vague rhapsodizings. And so, although the very spirit of modernism seemed to have invaded my mountain, it

was a pleasant invasion, and we enjoyed more and more the Parnassian charm of our isolation. We were all young enough still to exult in hearing our minds work.

One day, as Natalie and I were sitting in the living room windows after luncheon, a motor car, which we had heard echoing now and then up the valley as the road spiraled toward us, suddenly achieved a crescendo in the drive outside our range of vision. Upon the accentuated stillness ensuing, a voice arose.

"Gosh, that's some climb, ain't it? Hope she didn't boil."

The voice sang metallically. Through the porch, we glimpsed the maids loaded with three opulent suit cases, very expensive and very new.

Then a stocky figure, a blare of checked coat, diamond pattern golf socks, and flat sport cap, strode across. The brazen voice retreated, and we heard our hostess's gentle tones striving against it in welcome.

Olin, who had strolled in with a sketch block, stood listening. He shrugged.

"One of our charming fellow countrymen," he remarked.

"Even here!" Natalie straightened indignantly. "My dear, since prosperity struck our helpless country, it is positively humiliating to travel."

"He wears," Olin resumed gloomily, "an emblem on a heavy chain, and violent silk shirts. He has made quantities of money in stocks or oil or real estate, and began as an office boy. He comes from somewhere between Pennsylvania and the Rockies."

II

OLIN was uncannily close to the truth. Before dinner, we found the stranger in the living room, braying at the Englishmen, who listened with the reluctant British calm which frequently conceals an exquisite embarrassment of thought.

"And this friend of mine, y' understand, he said to me, 'Pete, this one's goin' to be a gusher, sure. I've got the dope from way inside, see?' An', so, I dug down into the old jeans, an' borrowed from a couple of pals—took a chance, see, an' soaked it all in. I'd been a driller for four years. In a month she blew. And there you are—and here I am, you might say."

And he stretched out short, satisfied legs, and laughed.

The circling complacency of his glance

caught us, transfixed within the door. A quick scrutiny, and he was bearing down on us, beaming, the hand of brotherhood and democracy extended.

"Ammuricans, ain't you? Heard they was some here. Blaine's my name—Peter K. Blaine, of Enterprise, Oklahoma."

He pumped our hands, and I glimpsed the Englishmen shamelessly exchanging winks.

At dinner, the soup well under way, Olin's pleasantly modulated voice launched itself toward one of the Englishmen.

"I'm afraid I didn't make clear, this noon, what I meant by the 'literary quality' in painting," he began. "To the painter, color and line are an end in themselves; do you know what I mean? They come first; any attempt of the painter to 'tell a story' must be subordinated to the purely aesthetic—"

The voice of Blaine cut across him.

"Gee, this mountain air sure gives you an appetite, don't it? First good soup I've et since I've been here. Maybe it's the heat. I don't know about turnin' winter to summer this way. Up in my country—"

Olin waited until he had finished, then leaned slightly across the table.

"As I was saying," he resumed, a little edge in his voice, "the literary quality—"

It was quite useless. Blaine's hearty tones trampled across the fragile cobwebs of his elucidations, and the only times that Blaine did not interrupt was when he was otherwise audibly occupied—with food.

And, indeed, in the next week he came to a sort of dinner table dominance by sheer volume of voice and weight of solidity. He was impossible to snub, for snubbery needs a latent sense of inferiority, and it simply never occurred to Blaine that the stories of his rise and fortune were not enthralling us.

"And, really," as Natalie said to me one day, "you simply *can't* ignore the creature's vitality. There's something epic about it. I wonder if Ulysses and Æneas weren't really like that—vulgar, pushing people who talked eternally about themselves. But one can't help being overcome—and amused."

Consequently, when Blaine backed his car out of the sleepy old shed that served as a garage, and ordered all and sundry to "Come for a ride—this bus 'll eat up any hill in the island," Natalie and I obeyed. I confess to the mercenary motive of want-

ing a drive, and there was no other conveyance on our hilltop.

The morning was golden, and the road dipped among green hills and slid between long, feathery lanes of bamboo. Blaine rather surprised me; his little lively gray eyes saw everything, from the mongoose, that peered out of a roadside drain, to the humming bird, a poised bit of green fire, that tweaked itself from blossom to blossom of an acacia.

Suddenly Natalie cried out in delight.

"Oh—wait—what a fascinating tower. I must see it!"

Blaine obediently skidded his tires, halted before a pasture gate, and presently we were climbing over a curve of upland meadow which hung above dropping mountains, toward two immense mango trees whose twisting branches framed a crumbling tower.

An indefinable sense of withdrawal indicated the place was unoccupied. A gate reluctantly led through thick walls, and we found ourselves in what had been a typical Jamaican planter's estate.

To our right, a heavy water tank greenly reflected the sky; on the left, the wall arose into the ruined tower of the grinding mill which had caught Natalie's attention. Cactus and bignone smothered it, their coral sprays and the salient line of stone vivid against the far dim sea.

Before us, filling the inclosure, stretched away paved oblongs, separated by low ridges and tilted for drainage at slight angles—the drying platforms, known as the "barbecue." They quivered with fragrant heat, and stillness stretched like a tent over the place.

Suddenly Blaine exclaimed: "Hey! Somebody lives here! Saw a face at that window!"

He pointed to a long, dingy, wooden building, with three crouching gables, a house so ordinary that our eyes had accepted it without further interest as closing the distant vista of the barbecue. It did seem vaguely alive; a curtain half screened one window; two bare-necked hens moved and vanished among bushes.

"Oh, dear, we've trespassed." Natalie spoke up at once. "Let's go and explain. It looked so empty; I never thought—"

It appeared a very meager life that animated that house; extending no farther than a few beds of canna lilies struggling scrubbily, and a wind beaten naseberry

tree, its branches all on one side, like a woman who has thrown her apron over her head.

As Natalie knocked, we heard within a faint scurrying, and she had time to whisper "Mahogany!" to me, and point out the weathered panels, before the door swung open and there stood framed a shrunken figure.

III

SHE looked like something from under Pook's Hill; narrow peaked face, gold spectacles astride a buccaneering nose, thin white hair drawn into a wispy little pig-tail. Long hands, their bones delicate and prominent, moved nervously at throat and skirt. Gray-blue eyes, friendly as an old pet dog's, looked out at us.

Natalie's apology was borne away on the welcome of a sweet husky voice.

"But we like it so much, visitors coming. It is our pleasure. You must see our view; there are certain vantage points. Sister Grace!" she called over her shoulder. "Here are some strangers."

Her tone was like the wind blowing through dried grass. Another of her appeared, a slightly smaller copy, straighter, with hair less white, and sharp brown eyes, and a brooch of opals and amethysts at her withered neck.

Natalie led swiftly through introductions. They were the Misses Havingford—Miss Lucy and "Sister Grace." This was Havingford Hill.

"And this," Miss Lucy announced with an inward gesture, "is Havingford Castle. Won't you come in?"

There followed our polite protests and the husky old voices rustling denials to them, as we stooped into the room.

Havingford Castle! Oh, brave feudal flourish of some broad backed pioneer! My first impression out of the sunlight was dark board walls, a low ceiling, and that ordered disarray of furnishing which discriminates mere neatness from taste. Shells mounted on plush; dried blossoms sere beneath bell jars—all those small monstrosities which old maids accumulate.

There was a gentle, chirrupy confusion of display and explanation in which Natalie centered. Blaine's quick little eyes had swept the room, dismissed it, and returned to those two fragile, withered old figures. They fluttered with animation, and beckoned us down a long low passage.

Natalie found opportunity to whisper to me, "There are some lovely old things here, mixed with the rubbish," before our hostesses halted at a door.

"This is the dining hall," Sister Grace announced, and we stood and stared in amazement at what that dingy exterior had masked.

For it was a noble room, gracious, and dignified. One felt in it instantly that pioneer sense of the enduring, the solid thing. A great dining table of mahogany shone softly.

Beyond, upon the end wall of the room, a graceful inset arch made an alcove, into which fitted a Chippendale sideboard. Cut glass sparkled there dulkily.

Out of a gratifying hush, Natalie spoke: "How *perfectly* beautiful!"

And yet, as they fluttered to her ecstatic darting progress down the room, it was not the beauty, but the pathos of that place which forced itself on me.

Floor, woodwork, and furniture were of rich mahogany, but whitening sadly where finish had succumbed to sunlight. The two services, set at one end of that immense shining plain of a table, cried loneliness.

Turnips and bundles of carrots littered a splendid sideboard. The shrunken pattern of the old women's lives had pulled pantry and dining room into one.

I pointed out to Blaine the rich blue of a plate, set presumably for cats, on the floor.

"Minton," I murmured.

"Who?" Blaine queried, honestly, and I was explaining the disparity between value and function when Natalie's cry turned our attention to her.

"Oh—not really—"

The Misses Havingford, hands now trembling delightedly, hovered round a corner; sister Grace removed a bowl of eggs, a pile of magazines, and two shawls; Miss Lucy turned aside a red cover and stood back.

"The clavichord," she said.

The sheer beauty, the finish and workmanship, of the instrument threw a little warmth over us as we stood round it. The long polished top gleamed like a sheet of dark water, as if the old rosewood had stored sunlit shadow throughout the years.

Reverent fingers lifted the lid. There lay the keys, their ivory an orange brown, the inclosing curves of the case gently embracing them.

"Do you play?" Miss Lucy clasped hands at Natalie.

The girl sat down as if spellbound, touched a key, and a little ball of tone rolled out, globular, smooth, compact.

Sister Grace piped eagerly: "All the strings play—it's in perfect condition."

Natalie began with delicate precision to trace a Bach invention. The music formed itself almost visibly, like patterns in old pearls. She played another, then slid one hand luxuriously along the gleaming top and turned to me.

"Why, Harold, it's a marvelous thing." There was a hush in her voice.

"We are so glad you like it—and appreciate it." Sister Grace smoothed a corner lovingly. "Yes, I taught my small niece—my grandniece, of course—for years upon it. And it gave her such clearness of touch; she won the competition. She is studying in Kingston now. Oh, yes, we have the instrument tuned every year. It is in such fine condition we've been told it is very valuable."

Natalie arose with a sigh, her hand lingering down a lustrous curved edge. "It's rarely beautiful, whatever its value. How you must love it. I—I quite envy you." She held out her hands, smiling gently into the delighted old faces. "We must not stay longer. You've been so good to us. May I come again?"

On the threshold, Miss Lucy extended a wavering bony finger at the Olympian vista before us.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she said. "It's always different."

Fluttering good-byes; frail, sweet, old voices, old eyes that blinked benignly. We trailed across the barbecue. Blaine looked at me, his own little orbs curiously bright.

"Gosh!" he said. "Those old birds have been lookin' at that view of theirs for the last seventy years. And they can still see it."

This drew a momentary gleam of pleased surprise from Natalie. Pretty good for Blaine. Then she returned to what was obviously an awakening passion.

"It's a museum piece—an exquisite thing—oh, dear—marooned on that hill-top—I never imagined one with both case and action so perfect."

Blaine slanted his cap at her, grinning. "You ravin' about that tinkly old piano?" He did not quite say "pie-an-oh"; he said "Puh-yannuh."

Natalie glared at him. "I suppose you'd prefer a shiny new concert grand."

"Don't know that brand," he returned, cheerfully. "Give me a good player-piano every time; more lively. But those ladies seem to hang onto that old music box. They act like two hens with one egg."

Natalie contemplated the road.

"They must be terribly poor," she said, finally. "And so old—I hope that niece has the taste to appreciate—"

IV

As the lazy days drifted by, Natalie took to making frequent pilgrimages to Havingford Castle. It was a long walk, and sometimes Blaine motored her over, teasing her about "getting hipped on that funny old puh-yannuh," and trying, with clumsy questions, to get at what she saw in it.

Sometimes she went alone. After one such visit, I met her on the road; preoccupied, a little excited.

"You know, Harold," she said, presently, almost with an air of secrecy, "I think those old darlings possibly—I really believe they might be persuaded to sell the clavichord. Miss Lucy asked me this morning what I thought it was worth. They spoke again of that niece—wanting her to have further study." She drifted into silence.

"What do you think it's worth?" I asked.

She came back with a start from what, I am sure, was a vision of the clavichord enshrined in her own apartment.

"More than I can afford, I'm certain," she confessed, ruefully. "But I might make them an offer. How I'd *adore* having it!"

Then, one day, as Blaine and Olin and I lolled on the porch, Natalie appeared in obvious excitement, almost running up the hill toward us. She plumped down with a breathless little laugh and shook back her hair.

"I've got it!" she cried, softly.

"Got what?" Olin demanded, with the density that seems the occasional province of brothers. But Blaine grinned.

"I know. That little old puh-yannuh," he said.

She nodded, sparkling.

It fetched an eager "No—really?" out of Olin, and she told her tale.

"I never dreamed they'd part with it—they love it so. But the other day—I told

you, Harold—they asked what I thought it was worth. Then, this morning, I inquired—oh, casually—if they'd consider selling. And it seems they'd been talking together. I—mentioned a price. And they *accepted!* I couldn't believe my ears!" Her face was radiant, and she gave a little wriggle. "Oh, you don't *know* what it means to me to get it."

Olin and Blaine spoke together.

"That's splendid, Natalie—Faussie'll go mad about it—"

"Well, guess you're purty tickled. Got what you want, didn't you?"

A momentary frown of caution creased Natalie's tanned forehead.

"Well," she admitted, "it isn't *definitely* settled yet. But it's practically sure. They admitted they needed the money."

"What for?" Blaine bit the end from a hideous stogy.

She made a little gesture of setting the question delicately to one side.

"Naturally, I didn't question them. But they said something about that niece—further study, perhaps. I believe they think she has talent. But, really, I was too elated to listen very carefully."

Blaine puffed his stogy an interval, then peered at Natalie through the smoke with a shrewd grin.

"How much they soak you?"

Natalie stiffened, then exploded into helpless laughter.

"Really, Mr. Blaine, your directness is most refreshing. Guess!"

"Don't know. You say it's so swell, an' a rare bird at that—couple o' thousand, mebbe."

"You flatter me," Natalie smiled coolly.

"But, of course, you don't know values in this field." She unconsciously lowered her voice. "I offered them eight hundred—all I could afford. Of course, it's worth much more; a third again—probably twice as much."

Olin whistled. Blaine's grin spread, and he held out a square hand.

"Congratulations, lady," he said. "You're some buyer. When do you get the final verdict?"

"To-morrow afternoon. I'm to come to tea. But they've decided already, I know. Olin, we must get a consular invoice; that lets us out of duty on an antique." She danced up the steps as the bell rang for luncheon.

Next morning I heard Blaine's car take

the road to Black River. At noon he presented to us a sober face.

"Leavin' you," he announced. "Pull-in' out right after lunch—cablegram. Lucky I went to town this morning. They don't deliver up here."

"Oh!" Natalie looked up from her book. "Not bad news, I hope?"

"Nope; just business. Never lets a fella alone. I sometimes wish I'd stayed poor."

After luncheon an attack of curtsying, that resembled mild epilepsy, swept the collected servants, as Blaine dispensed heroic largesse. He presently joined us, bristling with fraternal insignia, clearing his throat for farewells. The graceful exit is a rigid test, and the Blaines of the world somehow never learn.

But Natalie helped him, holding out a frank hand, and smiling.

"Good-by—it's too bad you have to go; but I should think you'd be consoled to be so important. I should. If ever Enterprise, Oklahoma, needs a good decorator, don't forget. *C'est moi*." And she made him a sweeping curtsy, charming, easy.

Blaine flushed up to his mouse-colored hair, mumbled, seized Olin's hand and mite, and hurled himself into his car. Contact with the steering wheel seemed to renew some of his self-confidence, and he grinned down at us.

"If you ever hit Enterprise, look me up. Anybody'll tell you where I hang out. Welcome all over the mat. Good luck!"

A wave of the square hand, a clatter of gears, and he bounded out of our lives down the rough hill road.

As we listened to his diminuendo, Olin turned on Natalie a malevolent twinkle. "Of course, Nat, you've charmed the man. Did you see the color he got when he said good-by to you?"

"High blood pressure, my dear," Natalie retorted, not to be baited. "Big business beginning to seethe in his brain. You know, Olin, I like him. That keenness—he'd never miss a shrewd trick. He's impossible, of course; but so amusing."

V

THAT afternoon Natalie insisted that I should go with her to Havingford Castle.

"To protect me," she explained, exhibiting a wad of traveler's checks. "I want to close my bargain."

The sun shone heavily upon the red dirt

road, and we were both mopping our foreheads when we turned in at the gate.

"I miss the Blaine taxi," Natalie panted, as we crossed the sky-curved meadow to the house.

We knocked long, and finally loud.

"They can't be out," she murmured, looking anxious. "I wonder—"

The door opened. Sister Grace stared at us wildly, her face twisted with distress. Something so obviously was wrong that Natalie flew into the room.

"Why, Miss Havingford—you are ill—what—"

The bony, delicate hands held her off; the husky voice rose to a wail.

"Lucy—Lucy—here she is!"

In a blurred anxiety, heightened by the darkness of the low room, Miss Lucy, a quivering little aigret of agitation, joined her sister. They clung together in the gloom. Natalie's eyes darted from one to the other.

"Why, what is it—what—" Suddenly her voice quickened. "Oh—you haven't changed your mind about the clavichord?"

At that they both poured out words. I caught blurred phrases.

"—since we'd already made up our minds to part with it—money—meant a year in London for our niece, with the scholarship—feel so dreadfully—"

Their incoherence merely grew. Natalie's clear voice fell gently, with a slight authority, upon their babble.

"Please! I am afraid I don't understand. Evidently something has upset you. Perhaps, if one of you spoke at a time—"

A glance flew between them, then Miss Lucy, the taller and elder, faced us with a kind of desperate calm. Her gusty old voice pinched the words.

"When we talked it over, we decided we'd have to sell the instrument; that we hadn't the right—" She turned toward sister Grace, to meet a quivering agreement—"the right to keep it, when the money would mean so much to our niece. She is young. So we decided definitely soon after you left."

The voice tightened a peg. "Then, this morning, the American gentleman, Mr Blaine, came over—"

"Blaine!" It tore out of Natalie entirely unconsciously.

"—came over. And—he offered us twelve hundred dollars for it—*twelve hundred*

dollars—and laid the money, all in new notes, right in front of us.”

Sister Grace’s quivering silence broke into utterance.

“And we couldn’t help it—we really couldn’t help it. He made us take the money. He said—he said it was worth it. He was so insistent, and so—so *strong*—” Sister Grace tossed her arms in a small, stiff gesture of despair.

Natalie stood like a stone, her eyes gone suddenly black.

“He—” She could barely get it out. “You mean—that man—gave you—twelve hundred dollars for it?”

“He made us—he insisted.” Miss Lucy reiterated, helplessly.

The words seemed to pass outside the sheath of stunned bewilderment in which Natalie stood frozen.

“But how—how could he—he—the man has—no more appreciation than a—swine. It could mean nothing to him.”

Then the sheath dropped from her, and she turned upon them, so that they shrank together.

“Oh, you promised me—you promised *me*—and I wanted it—I *wanted* it so—” and she sobbed suddenly, in bitter disappointment. The two old women were already weeping. I turned away.

No wonder Blaine’s good-by to Natalie had been so awkward. And I recalled her chance phrase: “He’d never miss a shrewd trick;” remembered his tribute to her as a “buyer,” and his casual questions about the clavichord.

Then I heard Natalie, her voice shaking: “I presume he—is coming back for it?”

“No,” sister Grace quavered. “He left an address. We are to have it sent.”

Natalie perceptibly pulled together. “Then I should like a copy, if you please. He—he might be persuaded to sell it.”

They looked at each other an instant; then Miss Lucy cried, eagerly, pathetically:

“Why, yes—why, yes, indeed, Miss Crewes; anything we can— Sister Grace, that envelope—there, on my desk, behind you.”

Miss Lucy fumbled with old fingers. “We haven’t opened it yet. We—we’ve been so upset.” She telescoped the paper back and forth before her eyes.

“It doesn’t seem very clear,” she murmured doubtfully. “My glasses— Sister Grace, you read it, won’t you?”

VI

SISTER GRACE turned toward the light from the open door, and read. Her face set rigidly, and she turned ashy white.

“Lucy—*Lucy!*” she gasped.

The paper fluttered to the floor.

With one swoop, Natalie retrieved it. Over her shoulder, in plain, quick writing, I read this:

THE MISSES HAVINGFORD,

Hav. Cstle:

Dear Misses—The address I want the little piano kept at is Havingford Hill. I hope your niece has a good time in London and gets on fine.

Yrs. respectfully,

PETER K. BLAINE.

And in Natalie’s face, as she raised her eyes from that letter, I read the shocked look of one to whom herself had been suddenly, remorselessly, revealed.

THE NEW MAP

You have remapped my heart:
There is no part
Of it you have not changed
Or rearranged.
Where it lay flat and dark
Now soars the arc
Of a fair rainbow. Heights
Calling for flights—
Undreamed of, both—set free
Miraculous
New aspirations. Walls
No longer frown on us
Who laugh at squalls.
You’ve made of *You* and *Me*
Wind-roses smiling, *We*.

Richard Butler Glaesner

Yellow

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—AN AUTHENTIC PICTURE OF THE
MODERN PRIZE RING, AN INSTITUTION VARIOUSLY
DESCRIBED AS "THE FIGHT GAME," "THE
MANLY ART OF SELF DEFENSE," AND
"THE BUSINESS OF BRUTES"

By Charles Francis Coe

Author of "Musk," "The Ranch Beyond," etc.

THERE had been to this virile young man's perceptions a mighty flash of light, the sort of explosion that appears to startled eyes as a streak of vivid lightning. After that there was a thud, and a dull, lingering ache, which permeated every bone and tissue of his body.

Now he could hear a faint but resonant drumming. It might have been the thunder following the lightning, except for the fact that the flash seemed to be recurring. That is, there was a dim light where there had been naught but Stygian darkness. And there was that drumming—drumming—drumming—

Suddenly, before his eyes there appeared an oscillating figure. At first it was indistinct, phantomlike. It fluttered through the haze over him, and he watched it, blindly, without understanding, but fascinated. As he watched, it assumed the form of a hand.

But what a hand! At first it was miles wide across the palm, and each of the fingers was miles long, and as thick as a tree trunk. As he caught the vague outlines of the hand the incessant drumming in his ears grew louder, and weird faces appeared about him, their mouths grotesquely open, their brows strained, their eyes bulging.

Now the hand was smaller and more human in appearance, and he saw that its oscillations were timed, rhythmical. He still lay supine, sensing that his eyes were open, that he was in an ordinary world which suddenly had been distorted, but he was uncaring, disinterested.

The drumming grew louder and louder.

It was much as if some one was slowly withdrawing from his ears cotton plugs which, until now, had precluded sound.

He was like a bather reclining on an ocean beach. The surf, near at hand, never had ceased its din; but he had fallen pleasantly asleep, and now was just waking. He did not wish to waken. It was as though he felt himself slipping unwillingly from a realm of bliss.

Yet he could not remain asleep. His eyes were beginning to focus, to see through the hazy world about him, and to discard the hallucination through which he had been gazing so pleasantly. The drumming melted into raucous voices, bellowing throats that screamed approval and satiation.

The hand above him moved on and on, but with a new significance. It was nearly a normal hand, now. The fingers had shortened, and clenched into a semifist, one finger pointing away from the rest, and rising and falling over him—rising and falling.

Above the din of the many voices there came to his rousing ears one distinct voice. It was counting.

He could not identify the numbers that it said, but he knew that it was counting, because the utterances matched the rising and falling of the hand.

Then, returning intelligence engulfed him. It struck him almost as might have a terrific wind. It routed from his brain the last shred of the blissful haze into which it had been plunged. And in the routing it brought pain.

His temples throbbed, his chest heaved,

his very bones ached. But intelligence located the various elements of his delirium. It explained that the thunder of voices came from a fight crowd who had seen him felled.

It told him that the hand hovering over him was that of a referee, and that the rhythmical rising and falling, synchronous with the chant of the distinct voice, was the count for an ill-fated boxer.

He had been knocked down! He had fallen before the terrific attack of an enraged opponent!

As though his intelligence, having rested, was now doubly acute, it encompassed the terrible facts in one sweeping gesture. It told him that he was the vanquished; that all the prophecies at which he had scoffed had come to pass.

It pointed out to him, in that dreadful second of rousing consciousness, that all the unfriendly forecasts about himself had materialized, that the drumming in his ears was little less than the gloating of those who had scorned him.

It told him, too, that now was the moment to fight. Now was the second in which his whole career was on trial. He must be weighed in the eyes of a fickle public this instant, or never.

The hand arose again, fell again. This time he caught the word which came with the gesture.

"Seven!" the referee shouted, and the hand started its upward course again.

The man on the floor struggled upward, and fought with crazy legs and tallow knees for the strength to stand erect. He got one knee under him and half rose. One hand, he scarcely knew which, served as an impromptu prop to hold for him the ground he had gained.

"Eight!" came that implacable voice, and again the hand started upward. There would be only one more count in his favor, and the tenth would spell his doom.

How rapidly the hand traveled! If they would only give him a chance!

He wanted to cry out, to stop the inexorable count for just a fraction of a second, to tell them that he would arise in a moment, and fight again.

He wanted to tell them that he had seen the blow coming, and had meant to dodge it; in fact, knew just how to evade it—but for some absurd reason had not done so. If they would only wait an instant—but they would not.

"Nine!"

The man on the floor sobbed a broken cry, heaved himself upward, and his feet caught the canvas under him. He could not see clearly, his head reeled, and the lights over the ring became a dancing galaxy which brought nausea to his stomach.

But he was up! The referee had stopped that crazy counting, the cheers of the crowd had silenced as though by magic, and the last note of them had been in his behalf. They had seen his courage, at least! They knew that he was fighting, that it was all a mistake, this knockdown; an accident!

Then, through the growing spectrum of consciousness, he saw the same glove which had felled him, flying at him again.

Once more he tried to twist out of the way of the blow; once more he knew that he had only to move from its path to foil his adversary.

And once more the blow found its mark, and his weary head snapped back with sickening force.

There was no drumming in his ears after that punch. The vast crowd, the gyrating referee, and the reeling, scintillating lights that had made him sick, were gone. He had no consciousness of falling; he felt no impact when his battered body struck the floor.

The first consciousness he next knew was when water was coursing over his face and a man was holding some acrid substance under his nostrils. Streaks of fire shot upward through his nose, his eyes, his weary brain. A voice said:

"Come on, kid, snap out of it! You're all right!"

Another man was vigorously rubbing the back of his neck. Full consciousness and intelligence returned, and the terrible fact was plain to him.

He was beaten—knocked out! In this, his first professional battle in a ring, he had been knocked out!

Never again, probably, would his chance come! The folks back in the little village would know of his disgrace in the morning. The milk train would bring the newspapers as usual, and old Tom Morgan, the freight agent, would turn to the sporting page and search for the news the town awaited.

Tom would find it. The beaten man could visualize him even then.

Tom would read about the main bout only glancingly, then he would find the

paragraph in which the preliminaries were covered.

"He was licked!" Tom would say. "I told you he would be! Knocked out, he was—knocked cold!"

"Hustle along, kid," the man at his side was saying. "You're all right. Step along! Don't stumble over that rope."

He felt himself lifted by the arms; he struggled to walk. His still gloved hands gripped the ropes which had encompassed his downfall. He climbed through and down among the men in the first row.

One of them slapped his arm consolingly and said: "Never mind, kid! Better luck next time!"

But there would be no next time! Never again might his chance come.

He had wanted so to win! The money—the things he could do with it—

Some one brushed past him and climbed into the ring. The forgetful crowd cheered lustily. The beaten lad looked up, and there was a new fighter on the chair he had just left.

The clasp on his arm tightened and urged him forward. Suddenly he remembered.

It was little Spike Martin beside him; Spike, who had used his own money to come to the city for the fight; Spike, who would rub him down, now, and Spike, with whom he had dreamed his dreams of fame and of riches for them both.

He looked at Spike, then stumbled along at his side. Behind them the announcer was shouting names and weights of the next pair of fighters.

The crowd did not heed his passing. There was only himself and Spike—and defeat.

He looked at Spike and choked a little on words that would not come. Then Spike looked at him, and the handler's eyes became tear-dimmed, and he, too, was mute.

II

THE dressing room which the beaten youth had used was one that he was obliged to share with several other boxers and their handlers and well-wishers. On their return to it, he and Spike became the recipients of many curious looks.

The defeated boxer felt those looks sweep over his face. He heard one man say: "He ain't cut up any!"

Then the beaten one went numbly to a bench at the side of the room. From their suit case under that bench Spike drew out

a bottle of liniment and silently began rubbing his charge's tired arms and shoulders and back with the liquid.

Spike knew how to rub. The dead feeling slowly crept out of the throbbing muscles. The fighter's head had cleared fully, and he stretched out there, wordlessly, while Spike rubbed.

Once he felt the contact of a tiny hot splash on his back. He managed to glance backward and upward over his shoulder, and saw that Spike was working through eyes that were blinded by tears.

One of them had coursed down over Spike's cheek and fallen upon his own aching flesh. He loved Spike for this.

Just before they were dressed and ready to leave the building, the victorious fighter came to them. He was smiling, and he offered his hand. The loser accepted it in silence.

"It was a good fight!" the winner said cordially. "I'm sorry you had to take the rap, kid! But it was you or me. Good luck to you!"

The defeated man nodded, stooped, and picked up the bag, of which Spike instantly relieved him. Then the two went out into the corridor and toward the box office, where the promoter had told them to come for their money.

The ceremony there was brief and to the point. A rat-eyed man behind a screen folded four ten-dollar bills together and slid them through the screen. The loser accepted the money, dipped his head in a perfunctory thanks, then separated the bills and counted them.

He stepped to the screen again, the money in hand. But before he could speak the rat-eyed man snarled at him: "Well, what's the holler?"

"There's only forty here," the loser said slowly, at the same time holding forth the bills for inspection.

"I know how much is there!" the man snapped hastily. "Didn't I count it?"

"But you said there'd be fifty."

"Fifty for six rounds, I said!" the man snarled. "You git yourself knocked kick-in' in four and want all the dough. Don't make me laugh! You're damn lucky it ain't twenty you're gettin'."

And so the beaten man turned away with the four ten-dollar bills crumpled between his fingers. Spike followed at his side with the suit case.

On their way out they again met the

victor in their bout. He grinned a welcome and paused a moment.

"Did you grab off the gelt?" he asked anxiously.

The loser showed him the bills, and the winner appeared relieved.

"Watch out for a right hand coming up," he counseled his late antagonist. "That's what I nailed you with. All you need is experience. Of course, I'm pretty fair at the game. You picked tough going for your start, kid!"

Then he went on to the window to try his own fortune.

"You had him licked till he brought up that right!" Spike muttered thickly. "It was a lucky punch for him!"

It was the first time he had spoken, but the loser did not answer him. They stood together on the sidewalk outside the fight club.

Neither of them had thought for a moment of remaining for the fights that were to come. Some strange alteration in their psychologies had asserted itself. They seemed to want to be alone.

There they stood for several minutes, Spike holding the suit case, and obviously awaiting the decision of the other. The loser was lost in a maze of shattered dreams and terrible reality.

"We'll go to Terry Jones's place," the fighter said at last. "We can't go back home yet!"

"Nope," Spike agreed promptly. "We can't go home—not now!"

And then the boxer divided the money he had received and offered Spike two of the ten-dollar bills. But the rubber shook his head.

"Lemme go with you, Jimmie," he pleaded. "Just lemme string along. I don't want no dough. You pay the expenses. I won't eat heavy."

Together they started cross town toward Terry Jones's place. It was the only haven they knew in the city. There they had lived while the loser was training for this disastrous fight.

Terry ran a gymnasium downstairs, and had several rooms which he rented to fighters on the floor above. After a fashion, he served meals, also. Many fighters trained there.

"How'd you come out?" Terry greeted them when they arrived.

"Lost!" the boxer said bitterly. "We want to keep the room awhile, Jones."

"Sure. Eight bucks a week," the proprietor half grunted. He accepted one of the ten-dollar bills, and gave the loser the change. Then he made an entry in a paper-covered book with a stub of a pencil.

"That kid's got a tough right hand, Jimmie!" he said, by way of consolation. "A tough right hand!"

But Jimmie did not answer. Instead, he glanced at Spike, and the latter, still clinging to the suit case, trailed him as they walked through the darkened gymnasium with its sweaty odor and phantom apparatus, and so to their room.

"It was his right!" Spike ventured as they undressed. "That's all he had, Jimmie. You had him beat up to then."

"That's all he needed!" Jimmie said forlornly.

"He'd never land it again!" Spike averred vehemently.

Jimmie laughed bitterly. "I guess not! He'll never get the chance! Who'd send me in there now?"

"I would!" his rubber declared stoutly.

"You can't! That's the laugh!"

For a long while they were silent, each unhappy in his own thoughts. Then Jimmie spoke, and the tone of his voice carried a world of pathos.

"I can't go home, Spike. I can't go back to that town and have the wise ones see me and grin and say nothing! Old Tom Morgan, with his three teeth and his mean tongue!"

"I'm going where you do, Jimmie," Spike said, "just as long as you'll let me. I can help a little, I bet!"

The next morning they bought a newspaper, and both went white as they read about Jimmie Quinlan having been stopped in four rounds. The sports reporter apparently had plenty of space, and his account said:

The other boy found Quinlan's glass chin in the fourth. The kid was doing well up to that time. But it is the same old story. No fighter is a success who cannot take it. Our hunch is that Jimmie Quinlan is not fond of the gaff. Some might even say he was yellow. He took one knockdown before he went out.

Others about Terry Jones's place read the account. That day they nodded friendly greeting to Jimmie, but it seemed to him that there was a light in their eyes which seemed understanding, perhaps a little commiserating. He hated it, yet he could not resent it.

"Glass chin!" The phrase grew ominous in a frequency of utterance. He heard it on all sides.

Now and then, when men did not know that he could hear, he heard the word "yellow." It slowly dawned on him that they considered him a coward.

He did not mention the thought even to Spike. And in two or three days all talk of the affair was dropped.

He became just a hanger-on at Jones's place. He was a lad who had tried to fight and who couldn't, and who was destined to go on trying in gymnasiums until, eventually, he grasped the truth.

The men back home had read that account, too. They would see it in the blackest possible manner.

"Yellow!"

The word became insidious to him until it rang like the voice of death. And they knew it back home!

What could they know of the dreadful drumming in his ears, or the weird hand that had oscillated above him? Nothing! And so they would believe that he was a coward. He had fallen at the first severe blow!

It palled upon him; it mystified him. He reached that point where he himself did not know whether cowardice or plain physical inability had beaten him.

What was ring cowardice? Was it cowardly to have a glass chin?

Finally he went to Terry Jones about it. Jones was big and strong, and aggressive, and had lived much among fighters. To this man he said:

"Am I yellow? Because I got up only once, am I yellow?"

"There ain't any way of knowin'," Jones replied, judicially, "until I see a guy take it! How can I tell? Some guys hit clean and hard, and lay you low with one punch. Others only bring you down by degrees. Mebbe this bird caught you clean. He's got a bad right. I told you that!"

"I'll fight!" Jimmie Quinlan said earnestly. "I'll fight just as long as I can stand up! I'll prove it! I'll prove it right here! I'll box any man that trains here. See if I'm yellow!"

"You bet he will!" Spike added. "He'll beat most of 'em, too! He had that guy on the run till that one punch went over!"

Jones laughed a little, and shrugged. "How much do you weigh, Quinlan?"

"One forty-eight or fifty."

"Well, Dinny Wheeler starts workin' here in a couple of days," Jones announced. "Try it out with him! He'll give you a test, kid!" And Jones laughed as if the joke was a good one.

"He's—he's the champ of the welters!" Spike gasped.

"I'll work with him!" Jimmie said. "I'd work with the devil himself! I'll find out if I'm yellow!"

And so the two stayed at Jones's place and waited. The poignance of their return home would be less after the passing of time.

And Terry Jones, in anticipation of seeing the youngster who had lost his first fight go against the champion in a hard work out, let Jimmie train at no cost.

Word was passed around among Jones's cronies that Quinlan would test himself against the unbeaten champion. Grimaces of amusement altered into wonderment when these gymnasium visitors watched Jimmie in training. He looked fast, strong, clever, sure of himself; and appeared to possess that most important of all ring things, the love of fighting.

"But he's yellow!" they said. "He can't take it. He's one of these four-round boys that dance three and run one. He falls if you breathe heavily on him!"

III

IN the mysterious, half-mouthed manner in which such tidings always travel, word of the trial of Jimmie Quinlan's courage found its way through the boxing fraternity. Men who seldom came to Terry Jones's place were on hand the day the champion was to begin his training.

Naturally, word of Quinlan's purpose also reached the title holder. Of all valued things in Fistianana, a ring belt is, perhaps, the most highly cherished by its possessor. It followed that the champion viewed the situation with a careful eye to its pugilistic hazards.

"Many a mug has hung one on the button of a smart guy!" he said to a group of his friends. "This ham was flattened by a pork-and-beaner not long ago—but kids do funny things! He can work with me all he likes; I don't mind that. But don't think you can rib up a sucker on my name!"

All of which meant, as the wise ones knew, that the champion would chance nothing. He would box with all he had,

and hit with all he had. It would be rough going for young Jimmie Quinlan.

Terry Jones, not unmindful of what might be done financially, cannily arranged that the champion should not appear on the day appointed. When all the curious had gathered they were greeted by a crudely painted sign, advising them that the title holder would start his training the next day, and that admittance to the gymnasium would be by ticket only, the tickets being thirty-five cents each.

As soon as the financial angle appeared, the boys who spent their idle hours in Terry's place sought out Jimmie Quinlan, and endeavored to learn whether he really meant to fight the champ. Was he going to try to prove, at the title holder's expense, that he was courageous?

"I'm going to box him," Jimmie declared, a bit nervously. "I'll box anybody to prove that I'm not yellow just because I got knocked out my first time in!"

The tickets sold well, and the gymnasium was crowded by the fight hungry well before the hour at which the champion was to appear. Spike was there, hanging at Jimmie's side as closely as his shadow. He rubbed his charge's arms slowly, whispering to him nothings that were somethings because of the friendship that prompted them.

Jimmie himself was tense, and almost cold, so taut were his nerves and muscles. Uppermost in his mind was the determination not to succumb to the blows of the champion.

He knew that he must take a drubbing. The champion would not spare him. For that he did not care.

His one thought, his one prayer, was that he might withstand that drubbing and forever dissipate the devastating rumor that a thoughtless news-writer had unwittingly set afoot. Jimmie Quinlan was going to fight for his badge of courage, his manhood, his sanity.

When the hour of trial came, every one watched the proceedings with the keenest interest, yet none permitted that interest to appear more than a casual one. Everything was done informally.

The champion worked at the pulleys to loosen his flowing muscles. Then he punched the bag for two rounds, and skipped the rope for three minutes.

By that time his rugged shoulders and square face were damp with perspiration,

and he turned grinningly toward Terry Jones and asked:

"Any of the boys want to work three rounds?"

Terry glanced around at the admiring array. None spoke, because all knew that they should not speak. Presently Terry's eyes lighted on Jimmie, tense and waiting.

"You want to go a bit, kid?" he asked, smilingly. "The champ ain't out to kill nobody!"

Silently, Jimmie stepped out, Spike just behind him, and Jones tied on the six-ounce gloves.

Unlike most of the neophytes of glove-dom, Jimmie offered no excuses. He did not make himself look ridiculous by telling the smiling champion how bad he was, as so many beginners do in these gymnasium affairs.

Rather, he was the fighter who sought to do battle. He was the lad, shattered in spirit, who risked all in the supreme test, and now stood waiting to meet that test.

The champion nodded and stepped back. Spike set in place a chair in the corner of the improvised ring. The crowd gathered closer.

"Time!" Terry Jones sung out, his eyes resting upon a stop watch in the palm of his hand.

The champion paused a moment, then slouched forward a little clumsily and led lightly with his left. But back of this tentative lead there whipped a vicious right hand, designed to catch the kid unawares and settle matters in a single punch.

Jimmie Quinlan was watching for it. He did not dodge awkwardly. Instead, he slipped the punch naturally and countered sharply with his own right, which the champion brushed aside with a shoulder.

It was a good opening. Indeed, it was so good that the champion pulled away slightly and fell into a semidefensive crouch from which he shot a straight left flush to Jimmie's face.

Scarcely had the leather glove tasted flesh than blood showed on Jimmie's lips and nostrils. It had been a stinging punch, and one that jarred him badly, and the champion followed it immediately with a right hook to the wind that was hurtful.

But Jimmie did not lose his head. He covered, and backed away, the chuckles of the spectators ringing in his ears.

The champion, a tolerant smile on his face, crowded closer, both hands set and

ready, his feet gliding over the floor with wonderful timing and grace. His body presented a moving target, weaving, darting, elusive.

Jimmie gave ground until his back was against the ropes. Then he lunged suddenly into an unexpected attack, his left hand scraping across the champion's face, his right sinking a driving blow into the great one's midriff.

The watchers applauded a little. Jimmie had fought his way off the ropes with none other than a champion before him!

"Uses his bean a bit," Jones said, grinning in mild interest.

The champion ripped another upward shot into Jimmie's wind. It partly doubled the lad, but both his own hands lashed out in return, and both landed—the right without a great deal of force, the left with real power.

The champion took a backward step from the punch, and grinned his appreciation of the other's effort.

They sparred a little while in the center of the ring, and more than one looker-on opened his eyes as Jimmie held his own at long range.

He was a natural boxer, they said—but there are hundreds such. What the making of a champion requires is the heart to assimilate punishment as well as deal it out to others.

Then came the call of "Time!" Jimmie returned to his corner and sat down, while Spike rubbed his neck and gave him the juice of an orange.

"You got him guessing!" Spike whispered. "He can't reach you if you keep away. Feed him that sweet left!"

"He can make the fight any way he wants to!" Jimmie muttered. "All I know is I'll fight as long as I can see him—and stand up!"

Once again Terry Jones called time. Like a flash, the champion was out of his corner and across the ring.

He swung wickedly with his right, and the blow caught the unprepared Jimmie just above the ear. He sprawled across the floor, but arose at once. The champion met him with a straight left, then shot his right upward.

Jimmie saw the blow coming. For a fleeting fraction of a second he might have been back in the ring a few nights before. He tried to stop it, slipping his arm down to block the flying fist.

But he failed. The blow came upward with the rush of a meteor. He swung aside to avoid it. It followed him.

Once again there came that blinding flash, the mad drumming, then silence.

"It was his right!"

Those were the first words Quinlan heard. They came from Spike, who was working over him in the little chair in the corner of the ring.

"Too bad!" Jimmie heard some one else saying. "I didn't know the kid would drop with a sock on the whiskers! I'm sorry I nailed him so clean, but he's my weight and my size, and he packs a nasty right to the wind. I'll swear to that much!"

It was the champion! He had proven that the sports writer was right.

The champion had just shown the curious, at the price of thirty-five cents each, that Jimmie Quinlan was only another fancy boxer, a fighter without the fighting instinct, a boy who went to pieces when the going got rough.

"It's true!" Jimmie groaned. "My God, it's the truth! I'm yellow!"

"You ain't!" Spike countered heatedly, wiping a soaked sponge over Jimmie's head. "It was his right—the same kind of a right."

"You're not yellow!" the champion attempted to soothe him. "Hell, kid! No guy is yellow that even climbs into a ring! And you can box a bit, too! I'll get you a guy that can't hit, and we'll give you a chance on the card with me two weeks from to-night. I'm sorry I socked you—but I wasn't sure!"

"Neither was I," Jimmie said thickly. "But don't worry about it; I don't mind being socked. I just can't stand the gaff."

"Get him that shot with me, Terry," the champion said to Jones. "Tell Mack I'd like to see the kid get a century for boxing Mort Dixon. Mort's a snappy boxer that couldn't bust a cream puff with a hammer! Want the shot, kid?"

Jimmie's mind had gone back again to the home town, the town to which he could not return. He looked up at the champion and nodded assent.

"Yeah," he replied. "Spike and I need the dough. If this fellow can't hit I guess I might look pretty good with him."

There was surrender in his words and tone. He was crushed, a lad who took the only way out of an unbearable situation.

"I'll get you the shot, kid," the cham-

pion promised. "And you stick around here with Terry, and we'll work a bit more together so you can grab off a couple points about the game. This Dixon won't knock you; you might even knock him. He can't hit. You won't have to take it!"

IV

THE last words of the champion were all that Jimmie Quinlan needed to bring despair. They impressed themselves indelibly upon his mind:

"You won't have to take it!"

Had it been anything but that, Jimmie would have found some solace. If the champion had laughed at his lack of skill, if he had sneered openly at his failure at the fight game, if he had done anything on earth but whisper consolingly that Jimmie would not need courage in the impending bout, he could have stood it.

But *that!*

That frank statement advertised that here was a chance for a coward, a time when a dancer and a boxer might make the grade to a hundred-dollar purse! That was what hurt.

It went deeper than any one present knew. It coursed through Jimmie's veins like some caustic solution that ate away the very heart of him.

Yet he clenched his teeth and struggled to keep back any evidence of the heart-break that was his. Had he done his best and found it wanting, that would have been but defeat. He could have stood that, and drawn from a consciousness that he had given his best effort, a certain consolation.

But it was not that. He had fallen at a punch! His courage had been on trial, and his courage had been found wanting.

And, out of sympathy, the champion had thrown him the sop of an easy battle with a man who could not hurt him. His opponent would be a man who couldn't "bust a cream puff with a hammer!"

"It was the right coming up," Spike kept saying.

And the curious onlookers, apparently satisfied that their thirty-five cents had not been wasted, left the place as the champion began dressing after his work out. No one heeded Jimmie Quinlan. He stood in the unenviable position of the mug who had taken it from the champion!

But Spike was still at his side, Spike who had come to the big town with him, Spike who had shared his confidence, and

who refused to believe the shameful thing which had been twice proven. Spike was at his side, rubbing his neck again, and asking him if he felt all right and was ready to dress.

In that moment, too, he loved Spike.

"It was the right," Spike repeated, wonderingly. "They both got you with a right that was coming up, Jimmie! Up to that punch you was even holding the champion off!"

"They got me!" Jimmie muttered. "One punch! I can't take it, Spike! God knows, I'm not yellow! I mean to fight. I'd get up if I could!"

"He knocked you goofy!" Spike admitted. "But he's the champ!"

"The first one was a cheese!" Jimmie retorted, angrily.

"But it was the same punch!" Spike insisted. "You gotta figure to stop that right coming up."

"If it wasn't the right coming up, it would be the right crossed, that's all," Jimmie declared, despondently. "Those punches don't hurt me where they land, Spike! I'm never hurt! They do something else to me. They make my legs feel funny, and my eyes don't see, and my arms won't work the way they should!"

"They knock you goofy," Spike said stubbornly. "Just plain goofy!"

And so they dressed and went to their room and pondered about the future, that future upon which both had staked so much.

There had come a change in Jimmie. His confidence was gone. From a thoroughbred chafing at the bit he had become a plug.

He was ready to admit a cowardice he hated. The fact that he fell at the first hard punch made him yellow in the eyes of the fight fraternity.

How could he make them see the difference between sheer inability to get up and the cowardice that cringed from another hurtful blow? He could not. He would not even try. All yellow boxers tried to explain; all were adept at excuses!

"We can't go back home, Spike," he would reiterate. "You can, but I can't! There's nothing here for us, old boy. They got me down as yellow!"

And Spike would reply doggedly: "You ain't yellow! I don't know what it is, but it ain't yellow. I ain't going home, Jimmie. I'm going with you!"

And so they stayed on at Terry Jones's, and Terry permitted them to use the gymnasium. Time and again, as he punched the bag or shadow boxed, Jimmie would hear comments from those who did not know his story.

"A likely looking kid, that!" one visitor said.

But there was always the initiated hang-on about the gymnasium to disillusion such a speaker. "Yeah," the wise one was apt to say, "but he ain't got the guts. Yellow!"

And that one word always sufficed. Jimmie saw that it was so. He saw men raise their brows in a leer of understanding, and turn away and watch other workers there. He learned his hard lesson. One who was yellow had no place in the ring.

But he went on training. He worked doggedly to perfect his wind, his right cross, his jab. He would box this Mort Dixon, avowedly for the hundred dollars that was to be paid to him.

Dixon, they said, was clever. He was fast, shifty, smart. But he could not hit. Perhaps Jimmie Quinlan could stand a fight that would not cause him much physical pain.

The champion came again and again to Terry's place. Jimmie boxed with him every day, the champion holding back his big punch.

"You give me a great work out," he said once. "You can box naturally. Too bad you can't take it a bit, kid. You might get somewhere!"

"Watch the right coming up," Spike would counsel as they boxed. "Keep your left arm low, and get it back quick after a lead, Jimmie!"

And so Quinlan perfected a boxing style that kept his left arm low after a lead. Again and again he blocked the right coming up. Time after time he slipped the punch and countered with a well-timed right cross of his own.

There was never any doubt of his going the three rounds with the champion now. The champ carried him along.

Every one knew that. In the heat of a spirited exchange of blows it was clear that the title holder was pulling his punches. He would let Jimmie drive with all he had, but, in order to get his work out, he would pull his own punches.

"What a damned shame," he said to his handlers, after a spirited bout, "that this

kid can't take it. What 'll overcome a streak?"

Even wise old Terry Jones shook his head, hopelessly. Overcoming a streak meant the changing of a man's heart, his brain. Who could do that?

Jimmie Quinlan was a marked man. He was definitely placed among those who stand on the fringe of ringdom.

But the champion rewarded Jimmie for the work outs. He "got him the shot" on the championship bill. Quinlan and Mort Dixon were to appear on the bill in the second preliminary. It was not a very good spot, but it meant one hundred dollars to Jimmie, win, lose, or draw.

And that one hundred dollars would keep him and Spike in the city for weeks. It would preclude the sneer of old Tom Morgan and of others in the home town which he and Spike had left for a fistic fame that had fizzled.

Jimmie was in superb condition on the night of his third test. He was dressed and ready to enter the ring when the champion arrived at the stadium.

To his pleased surprise, the title holder came to him and shook his hand, and said, that if Jimmie won, he could get him spotted again soon.

"You can't take it, kid!" he finished. "Remember that. Keep away from all the pasting you can, but this bird can't knock you with a punch, and you're clever enough to stand him off. You can hit, too—harder than hell! Cross him once or twice and he'll lose his speed. You might even stop him, but he knows a lot. Be careful, now. This is a big break for you!"

And those words were lingering in Jimmie's consciousness when the club attendant came to their dressing room and sang out that the first bout was about to end. Spike seized the water bucket and went toward the door, behind Jimmie.

"Watch the right coming up," he said again. "I got everything we'll need here, Jimmie! Keep your left low, and wait him out till you can cross the right. That 'll win for us!"

Jimmie's thoughts, as he passed down the aisle of milling, noisy fans, were chaotic. He was keyed up to the effort of his life, yet behind it all was the certain conviction that he was yellow. He expected that, at the first clean punch to his jaw, a horrible sensation of nausea would assail

him, and his limbs would become useless and his eyes blinded.

He could visualize again above him that vast, oscillating hand of the referee—counting, counting, counting. A cowardice complex gripped him. The gloves on his hands seemed to weigh tons.

The referee called Dixon and Quinlan together in the center of the ring and gave them brief instructions. Then Spike and Jimmie wheeled toward their corners, and Spike pulled the old sweater off over the gloves, and whispered again to watch the right coming up. Then the bell sounded.

Quinlan turned to meet a terrific assault from his opponent. Dixon had flashed across the ring with the speed of a panther. He feinted with his left, then crossed his right, and the blow landed high on Jimmie's cheek.

He could feel the flesh writhing under the impact, and knew that his eye was swelling. The blow hurt him. It dimmed his eyes with tears of pain.

Then Dixon crossed his left in a sweeping hook, and Jimmie's head shook so that the water Spike had sopped over his hair sprayed those close to the ringside.

But Jimmie made a supreme effort. He lashed out with his own right, and knew that he had hit Dixon's body. Mort danced away, a scornful smile wreathing his lips.

Jimmie started after him, but was stopped by a beautiful left jab to the sore eye. Then he was dropped to his haunches by another right that opened a gash over his eyebrow.

This was no right coming up! Dixon was outboxing and outfighting him!

Some one at the ringside called out: "There he goes! It won't be long now! Yellow—that's it! He won't take it!"

But Jimmie, hurt although he was, and blinded by tears and blood, did take it. He waited for no count. He was up in a trice, and began a series of punches that drove Dixon back and broke up his vicious attack.

At the bell, ending the round, Dixon was on the ropes, rolling, weaving, slipping punches that came so fast he could not counter.

The crowd was cheering now. The lad who was yellow had suddenly found courage.

Would it last? Would Quinlan the boxer become Quinlan the fighter?

Dixon was certain to catch him again. Perhaps the next clean punch would make the yellow one fold up!

In the minute of rest, Spike dried the cut over Jimmie's eye with iodine. The fluid bit deep into the bruised flesh, burned stingingly, and dimmed Jimmie's eyes again with salt tears that were beyond control.

But a cold sponge at his neck and a sniff of smelling salts restored his faculties. He felt, suddenly, strong, and able and eager to fight.

When the bell came again, he was ready for a quick attack from Dixon. But it did not come. The veteran advanced slowly, his hands in defensive position, his crouch showing the care with which he intended campaigning.

He feinted with his left, and attempted another right cross toward the battered eye. Jimmie caught the right with his own left, then dropped into a clinch, and sank a steaming right into Dixon's wind. The veteran boxer gave ground, the smile coming to his lips again as he danced away.

"Follow him up!" some one screamed from near the ringside. "Follow him up, you sap!"

But Jimmie did not lunge in. He was gathering his fighting wits now. He knew the handicap that the cut on his eye would be. He knew that Dixon would play for that wound.

So he let the referee pry them apart from the clinch that followed Dixon's next lead. He, too, smiled a little as he sensed that he was faster than Mort; that he could slip his punches aside.

For the first time there incubated in his brain a definite plan for the bringing down of his adversary. He would wait him out, tire him, then cross his own right when the time was ripe.

And on that right he depended. Had not the champion himself given ground before it back at Terry Jones's place?

Dixon leaped in close, with speed and unexpectedness. Both his fists lashed out, the right for the head, the left for the body. Both landed, and a prolonged gasp spread from the ringside out over the watching crowd.

Jimmie was hurt. He gripped both the other man's arms and held them safe. He was hurt, but he was not stunned, and he seemed not to mind being hurt!

They struggled in the clinch. Suddenly

Dixon's head lifted and banged against Jimmie's cut eye. The hair ground into the wound, and the warm stream started again to course over Jimmie's cheek.

"Come on, yellow!" Dixon said, and grinned as they separated. "You'll get a bellyful next round!"

Jimmie clenched his teeth, darted after his tormentor, and, after feinting with his left, crossed a right that caught Dixon high on the cheek. The other fighter was not stunned, but the blow raised a welt and threw him into the ropes.

The crowd arose and cheered lustily as Jimmie darted in to follow the blow with others.

But Dixon was too smart for him. He weaved sidewise, and brought his own right upward.

The blow caught Jimmie directly under the chin. He dropped in his tracks, and the referee waved Dixon aside and began to count.

Jimmie was dazed, but he was not blinded. The blow had not brought to him the terrible nausea of which he was afraid.

He heard Spike calling from the corner to take a count. On one knee he poised and shook his head to clear it, and then he arose and lunged at Dixon.

The other man drove out with his right again, but Jimmie avoided the punch and sunk his own right to Dixon's body with crushing force. The veteran backed away, smiling again. Jimmie was after him, and they traded blow for blow along the ropes.

Dixon's eye was closing rapidly, now. Jimmie's was closed. The crowd, sensing one of those fights which come once in a year, was on its feet, cheering madly.

The referee danced about them, watching every move, every blow. It was one of those fierce exchanges in which anything may happen.

The bell rang, but neither fighter heard it, nor did they hear the referee yelling: "Bell! Bell! Bell!" They went on fighting, and Dixon managed to bring an elbow point against Jimmie's throat and grind it there, finally snapping it upward against his chin with terrific force. For his outlaw trick he received another of Jimmie's crushing rights to the body.

"What is this man fighting with?" Jimmie demanded of the referee as the official finally pounced upon them. "He'll be kicking me next! Watch his elbows!"

"Go to your corners!" the referee

snapped. "You two do the fighting. I'll attend to the rules!"

Spike gleefully greeted Jimmie in the corner.

"You got him, Jimmie!" he cried. "Oh, boy, what a fight! Yellow? Yellow, hell! You got him; he's backin' away. Watch the right coming up and keep after his body!"

Then Spike worked furiously with iodine, smelling salts, and water bucket.

Jimmie did not care for the pain in his eye, the soreness of his face and ribs where Dixon had pounded him. His one thought, his one prayer, was that, no matter what came to pass, he could fight off the terrible, blinding, paralyzing nausea if it came.

Once again the bell sounded. They met in the center of the ring, and their every move was watched by a tense and cheering crowd. Here was a fight!

Dixon attempted to box Jimmie, and the latter evaded his leads, timed his feints, and hit him time and again without return. Still Dixon kept back, his face swelling, his body reddening under Jimmie's tattoo of punches. Great a boxer as was Mort Dixon, he was plainly no match for Jimmie Quinlan.

Jimmie's arms were like rapiers, his speed of foot a thing that thrilled the crowd. Dixon gave ground, backing around the ring and trying only to defend himself. This continued until the whistle blew to advertise the fact that there remained ten seconds before the round's end.

That whistle was a signal for Dixon to act. He lowered his head and charged in with both arms flying. After his retreat throughout the round the attack came as a surprise.

Jimmie was stung by a right to the chin. He felt his lip split under the impact, and tasted the warmth of blood in his mouth.

But a new fighting spirit had come to him. Through battered lips he said:

"Yellow? Hell! You couldn't 'bust a cream puff with a hammer,' Dixon!" And he stood his ground, measured his timing for a right uppercut, and shot the punch home.

It landed. He saw Dixon fold within himself, saw his knees buckle and his eyes glaze.

Jimmie set himself for another punch, but Dixon fell before he could deliver it. The referee had counted six when the clang of the bell ended the round.

Dixon's seconds darted into the ring, dragged their man to his corner, and worked over him frantically. But before he turned away from them, Jimmie Quinlan heard Dixon talking.

The fallen fighter was struggling for control of his faculties, and his lips formed the words before his eyes betokened consciousness. The words were like a message from his heart.

"You said he was yellow," he muttered to his handlers. "Yellow? Hell! I caught him clean—and he took it. That guy ain't yellow."

Jimmie was back in his corner, now, and Spike was nearly weeping with joy. He bathed Jimmie's face and rubbed his neck, and asked a dozen anxious questions about the condition of his legs.

And to them all Jimmie made no answer. His mind was working on the campaign of battle upon which he had determined.

He recalled the words of the champion: "You can hit! You might even stop him!"

At the bell, Jimmie was the aggressor. Dixon jumped up to meet him, and the veteran was smiling in spite of his battered condition.

Into Jimmie's eyes had come a look of confidence. Dixon admitted that he was not yellow! Who would be better able to know? Dixon knew that he would not quit, that he never had quit!

They sparred a moment, Jimmie entirely disregarding the screams of the crowd, urging him to rush in. He was waiting, planning. He felt certain that one more right-hand blow would bring to Dixon that blindness which he, himself, had twice felt in disaster.

Three times he fainted with his left, but each time the veteran was too wary for him. Then Dixon, unexpectedly, led with his own right, and, although he missed, the blow carried him into a safe clinch, from which Jimmie could not escape. The referee tried to pry them apart, but Dixon clung doggedly.

And, as he clung, his hair scraped again and again over Jimmie's cut eye, and his elbows prodded into Jimmie's neck and body. But Jimmie stood it, uncomplainingly, scornfully.

He was supremely confident. The nausea would not come now. As long as he could avoid that he was safe, he told himself exultingly.

They were apart. Dixon was dancing away, and leering at Jimmie as he went. Jimmie followed him.

The veteran backed to the ropes, and appeared baffled at Jimmie's left feint. But Jimmie held back the right, and the veteran, expecting the blow, covered his head with his arms in a posture that made him look ridiculous.

Jimmie laughed tauntingly, and stepped back. Angered, the older boxer straightened and took a forward step. As he did so, Jimmie was upon him, and the right, which he had been holding, shot true to the mark.

Once again the crowd gasped. Mort Dixon fell face downward. The referee waved Jimmie back and stood over the fallen man.

Jimmie watched the magic hand as it arose and fell. It was normal in shape now. He wondered if Dixon was seeing the strange things he had seen with the conditions reversed.

The count was at seven before Dixon stirred. Then one of his sprawled legs moved, squirming under him.

But the effort was too great, too hopeless. The fatal ten sounded, and Jimmie went to his fallen foe and raised him by the armpits and aided his seconds to carry him to the loser's corner.

The crowd cheered. Spike, transfigured in expression, waited silently in Jimmie's corner. None of the newspapers next day had space to mention the tears that streamed down the handler's homely, happy countenance.

V

WHEN Jimmie Quinlan returned to his dressing room after the fight, the reception he got warmed his heart as had nothing else in the whole course of his life. Men who previously had looked on him with a mild tolerance, now shook his hand. On all sides there were remarks about the battle from which he had emerged the victor.

"And the kid knocks over Mort Dixon!" one man observed. "Mort ain't nobody's push-over! He can take it, and he's as clever as they come! How's the eye, kid?"

But Jimmie had little to say. A great peace had come over him. Deep within himself he knew that he was not a quitter, that the charge of yellow had been unfounded, and that the world must now know it.

Spike rubbed him almost tenderly. As he worked there came to the bench, now and then, men who shook Jimmie by the wrist and told him he had made the grade, and was a kid with a fighting heart. It was all very sweet, very desirable. Jimmie was happy.

Finally, Mort Dixon himself came to speak to him. The veteran shook his hand and grinned a little disconsolately. He announced:

"They tipped me you were yellow! Kid, you took plenty! And what a sock you have! Where did you educate that right mitt of yours?"

"Thanks!" Jimmie said. "They told me you were a light hitter! So we're even on jokes, ain't we?"

It was the first time the clever Dixon had taken the long count. He was unstinted in his praise of Jimmie's cleverness and punch.

For several minutes he stood there, making no excuses, simply telling of the crushing power of Jimmie's right hand, and his speed on both defensive and offensive work. Then he left, and went to the box office for his purse.

Jimmie dressed, while Spike packed the same old suit case they had carried since leaving home. While this was in progress, still another man came to them.

It was McGort, the promoter. He slapped Jimmie on the shoulder.

"A good fight," he said warmly. "A money fight! The crowd goes in for that stuff. I'll give you another shot in one week, if you like!"

"Sure!" Jimmie agreed promptly. "Another shot will be fine."

"Mebbe with Dixon on a return match, mebbe not," McGort remarked. "Of course, everybody knows Dixon can't knock 'em with one sock, and that don't draw so good. But this was a good fight! I'll let you know who you'll meet next week, huh?"

And so Jimmie went to the box office and collected the second purse of his life. He was intensely happy.

He felt that he had settled for all time the question of his courage. Surely, even though he had been twice knocked out, no one now could say that it was cowardice which had kept him down.

The men along the alleyway outside the dressing rooms smiled and nodded to him. "A pretty fight!" "Tough going there

for awhile, eh, Jimmie?" These and other remarks attested the change his standing had undergone with those who knew him.

Neither he nor Spike remained to see the champion fight in the wind-up event. There was something greater than a mere fight in their hearts. Each felt that he had been vindicated, and showed his feeling in the expression on his face.

They returned to Terry Jones's place in silence. Spike sat on the edge of the bed and prepared a cigarette, a fine line of yellow flakes drifting between his fingers to the floor. Then he said, simply:

"I knew you would."

"I knew I would, too, Spike," Jimmie agreed contentedly, "if that queer sickness and blindness stayed away."

"You blocked his right pretty."

"When it was coming up, yes. But that don't mean such a lot. The thing is—everybody gets hit. They all say Dixon can't hit, but I've got to admit that he hurt me a lot when he did land."

"Oh, sure!" Spike grunted. "The best of 'em gets hit. But you ain't yellow. I always told 'em that. You proved it. And you got a K.O. to your credit over a guy that never took it before. He's clever, that Dixon."

"Clever with his hair and his elbows!" Jimmie countered. "But not hard to hit with a straight punch."

"Nobody else ever done it the way you did, Jimmie. They was betting he'd take you inside four rounds, but you took him in three."

So they talked on and on. They lived the fight over and over again. Each punch was told and retold as Spike worked over Jimmie's cut eye and nursed the swelling of his cheek and lips. They remained in the room for about an hour, then went out to a restaurant and partook of many scrambled eggs and much coffee, a feast under the circumstances.

Spike smoked another cigarette or two at the restaurant. It was nearing the hour for the first edition of the morning newspapers to be out, and, although neither youth made direct mention of it, they could not tolerate sleep until they had read the account of the victory.

It was in Jimmie's mind that credit might be given him for courage. The more he thought about the fight, the more he realized that nice things about his game-ness could easily be said.

He had come from behind to win. The very opening seconds of the bout had seen him badly battered by a surprise attack.

So they waited, Spike smoking now and then, Jimmie referring again and again to the fight which had meant so much to him. And when a tattered lad, with a huge cap on his head, and a stack of papers under his arm, entered the place, they arose as one to buy copies of three different papers.

They now would see what all thought of the fight, and what had been printed for eyes to devour avidly back in the home town.

Jimmie Quinlan had made the headlines themselves!

The account of the fight was captioned by flaring type, revealing that Dinny Wheeler, the champion, had scored an easy knock-out victory over a second-rater, and that Jimmie Quinlan, rookie welterweight, had shattered all rumors to the effect that he was yellow by staging a glorious fight, and handing to Mort Dixon, clever veteran, the first K.O. of his career.

One paper said, in a great three-column head:

CHAMP AND QUINLAN SCORE K.O.'s

Youngster Upsets Wise Dope by Game Stand in
Opening Round

The two hungrily read the accounts. Jimmie felt his heart warmed anew. He had found public vindication, and that meant infinite happiness.

They folded the papers carefully and went back to Jones's place. In their room they read the accounts again, and, as Spike sleepily rolled into bed, he remarked: "I guess that 'll hurt us a lot, huh?" Then he laughed, and there was great glee in the tone.

"We'll be going home to-morrow or next day, Spike," Jimmie said. "You know, just to say hello. But we'll come back again."

"You mean hello to Nellie Downs!" Then Spike laughed again, and fell into a slumber that carried him from a world suddenly roseate, and which, he knew, would be roseate in his awakening.

Terry Jones met them in the morning, and he shook hands with Jimmie, as did others who had seen him fall at the hands of Dinny Wheeler in the gymnasium. Jones also said that Promoter McGort had come to him after the big fight the night

before, and told him that he would use Jimmie one week from that night if the youngster wanted the shot.

"Sure I do!" Jimmie said. "That means a hundred a week easy at that rate."

"He ain't sure whether he'll give you Dixon again, or some other boy. Wants to sound out the crowd, I guess. You made a hit with the boys, from the dollar ones up, Jimmie!"

"I'll go see him to-day," Jimmie promised. "I was going home, but if it's only a week till the next fight, I'll stay here and keep tuned up."

Terry nodded, accepted another room payment, and slapped the boxer on the shoulder. "You made a game stand, Jimmie. I'll say you ain't yellow!"

Jimmie saw McGort, and the promoter agreed to use him at the next regular show, one week hence. It was only two days before the event that Jimmie read in a newspaper that Dixon had declined to meet him again. The writer insinuated that Jimmie hit a little too hard for the veteran, and prophesied a bright future for the newcomer if he was rugged enough to take punishment.

Jimmy and Spike were ready for the fray the night of the battle. They saw by the afternoon papers that Jimmie had been set opposite "Shadow" White, the well-known Western welter.

None seemed to know much of White. His newspaper clippings had secured him the bout. He was described as a hitter with either hand.

Jimmie entered the ring with confidence, and so did the stranger. The first round was slow, the men fighting carefully, feeling each other out.

Jimmie made White miss several times with his right. The Shadow appeared to pack a terrific punch.

Just at the close of the round, Jimmie landed a left hook to White's head, which hurt. The Western fighter backed away, and Jimmie followed him, but the bell prevented anything more in the line of action for that round.

In the second Jimmie sparred his man. He boxed him off his feet, as the papers said next day. White missed repeatedly, and was stung time and again by Jimmie's flashing left.

But the Shadow was invulnerable to a right. He was fighting carefully, combating a man he sensed could outbox him,

laying back for the opportunity of landing the big punch.

The round went to Jimmie by a wide margin. Spike greeted him with a smile in the corner.

The third and fourth rounds were much the same, Jimmie boxing steadily, confidently; weaving, slipping, side-stepping with the spectacular ability of a natural boxer. Shadow White was boring in close, trying to clinch and bring down his man with body punishment.

At the end of the fourth, the bout was Jimmie's, beyond question. With only two rounds to go, he had taken no punishment, and was strong and fast.

The first blow in the fifth round settled the fight. White came from his corner, enraged, to make his do or die attempt to land the big punch.

He walked into Jimmie's left, absorbed the shock of the jab, then lashed upward with his right. The blow caught Jimmie's chin.

Again came that vast streak of light, the ensuing blindness, the giddy, ridiculous sense of detachment from all things worldly. And again came the tallow knees and the drumming in Jimmie's ears. When his senses returned he was being dragged to his corner.

Jimmie collected his money in silence. McGort himself paid him, and shook his head sadly.

"You got everything, including a glass chin!" he said.

Spike and Jimmie slept that night at Terry's place. But the next morning they left.

"I'm going home, Spike," Jimmie said, dully. "There's something wrong with me. White didn't seem to hit me very hard. But I went out. It's the same old thing. I beat Dixon because he couldn't hit. I beat White until he did hit. McGort said it all when he said I had a glass chin!"

"I'm going with you, Jimmie," Spike declared doggedly. "He hit you with a wild right coming up. You forgot to watch that."

"That don't mean a thing!" Jimmie snapped. "I'd have gone out if it was a left. There's something about me that can't stand punching. I go out, that's all—go out like a light!"

And late that evening, old Tom Morgan, freight agent at the station, saw the two

drop from the afternoon train. He paused in his work, spat thoughtfully over the station platform, then left his truck and went toward them.

"Go ahead, Tom," Jimmie suggested listlessly, "say it!"

"They said as how you had a glass chin!" Morgan grinned. "First they said yellow, then a glass chin. One's bad as the other, I'd say!"

The two walked away, Spike still lugging the bag. As they did so they heard Tom Morgan's soft laugh as he shuffled back to his truck. It was galling to them.

This was a return to the home town as utter failures! They had promised so much, and hoped for such great success, and opinion of their boyhood friends had been so divided.

"But if we hadn't come back, Spike," Jimmie said after awhile, "they'd have had a right to call us yellow!"

VI

WITH keen curiosity, the people of the small town sought the facts in connection with Jimmie Quinlan's failure. The village barber expressed his expert opinion to all his customers.

Tom Morgan had the glory of saying "I told you so!" at least a thousand times. The players at Worth's pool room each relieved themselves of a pet theory.

Through it all, Jimmie and Spike said nothing. Then, when the curious had been satiated with talk, after the fashion of small town gossip, Jimmie became the lad who had tried to become a professional pugilist, but wasn't strong enough.

Spike Martin found work in the junction freight office, where he was out of contact with the despised Tom Morgan. Jimmie also managed to find a place at the junction. His work was the painting and care of railroad signals and equipment over a six-mile section. The two youths were soon absorbed into town life.

Jimmie could be seen calling upon Nellie Downs with great regularity. Gossips said that it was the girl who had brought him back after his failure, and who kept him from becoming a derelict from the prize ring.

So time passed. As the personality of the boxing failure reasserted itself again in the community, he became a court of final resort on matters fistie, even though it was conceded that he was not himself a fighter.

When he was not with Nellie, he could be found at Worth's pool room, or in the barber shop, reading of fights and fighters.

"It's in his blood, poor devil!" the barber confided to his cohorts. "The kid's got a lot of heart. He fought with all he had. There's been cases like that before—glass chin. Some guys just can't stand a sock on the button. That don't mean they're yellow. And Jimmie can fight, too! He's clever; just see what them papers said about his fight with Dixon."

"Sure!" a customer sneered frankly. "All he needs is guys that don't fight back, and he'll be a champ in no time!"

There matters rested. Jimmie Quinlan painted his signals, climbing the structures upon which they were suspended, and working there with his mind in far-off fight arenas, his ears ringing with the cheers and the hoots of the multitudes, his nostrils filled with the odor of blood-soaked leather and rosin dust.

He never talked of his own fights. When asked directly about them, he spoke in monosyllables.

"I lost," he would say; or "I won." People soon learned that he did not care to talk about his ring experiences.

But he was always ready to express an opinion on impending bouts. He seemed possessed of prescience about fighters and their respective abilities when pitted against each other.

He grew within himself. Hour after hour he bestrode the structures where his work took him, dreaming dreams that were for his mind and heart alone. Sheepishly, he would rouse himself from a vision which had pictured him being crowned champion, or collecting a fabulous purse for defeating one of the fistic great.

Trains roared under him, at times, without disturbing him. He became a man apart from his fellows, one who lived within himself and found there the things most conducive to happiness.

Even to Nellie Downs he did not confide his dreams. She seldom talked of his fights.

Once he came very close to asking the girl to marry him. He actually began to make his plea, but he found a way out quickly, fear driven, shaken.

"I guess girls don't care much for fellows that get cut eyes trying to be fighters!" he said, and laughed hollowly.

"If you mean your own eye, Jimmie,"

she replied, "I like that scar. It isn't very big anyway, and sometimes a mark like that makes a person look handsomer."

He laughed again. Her fingers touched the scar, and she said she was glad that she hadn't seen him when he received the wound.

Her fingers lingered there, and a rush of sentiment gripped him. He caught her elbows in his hands and looked into her eyes.

She smiled back at him a little tensely. For several seconds they remained thus. Then, impulsively, much as if he fled from impending events, Jimmie released her and walked away without a word.

Nellie sat still for a long time, watching him as he strode off. He did not look back. She saw that he was walking away from the village, out toward the country road, and silence.

In that instant she changed from a girl to a woman in her understanding. She grasped the depths of Jimmie's stoical suffering. She realized poignantly that life to him was galling, that all his courage was required to keep him here in his home town where men thought him cowardly or a weakling.

Then another thought came to her. Perhaps there was something other than courage that kept him there. Perhaps she had caught a glimpse of that other something in his eyes when he had seized her elbows.

"Poor Jimmie!" she sighed softly. A fount of pity welled within her. She wished he would come back and let her share his burden with him.

Jimmie did not call on Nellie for a week after that. She saw him once or twice on the street, but he seemed to be avoiding her.

The thought hurt her infinitely, she was piqued when others noticed it, and she struggled to gain the courage to shun him—but she could not. She wanted him, she wanted to talk to him, to take from his heart a portion of the burden that she knew was there.

So she went to Spike Martin and asked him what was troubling Jimmie. He did not know.

Spike never knew anything that had to do with Jimmie's emotions. He simply loved him, believed in him, and assured the world that only "a right coming up!" had stopped Jimmie Quinlan from being among the rich and famous of the ring.

He could talk to Nellie about that, and

he did. But as to what might be in Jimmie's heart, Spike was without knowledge. But he promised to ask Jimmie to call on her again, and he did ask him, and then the young man's visits began once more, and the gossips settled back, comforted.

But the relationship between Nellie and Jimmie was not as it had been. Neither would reduce to words the thoughts which filled their minds, yet both knew that they were in love.

With the carelessness of youth, they let matters drift along, their faith supreme. All would come out right between them.

So, with paintbrush and dreams, Jimmie lived the next few months of his life. At times he felt happy. Nellie was everything to him; she and Spike.

He was always with one or the other of them. Spike occasionally appeared a bit jealous of the girl. Nellie seemed jealous of Spike, too.

From time to time the subject of Jimmie's fights would arise suddenly, to his sharp distaste. A traveling salesman came to town and remained overnight at the inn. He sauntered into the pool room during the evening, and recognized the former fighter.

Immediately he described in a fight fan's glowing terms the Dixon-Quinlan bout. Men gathered around and heard his tale, and through it all Jimmie said nothing.

"I thought you would be the next champ, Quinlan," the salesman assured him. "Boy, what a fight! Say, why did you quit the fight game? Just because you stopped a punch on the button when you had the fight won against Shadow White? That's foolish. You can step out now and beat the best of 'em!"

"Forget it!" Jimmie grunted, and with disregard of his well-wisher's feelings, he arose and left. Not so Spike.

"You bet Jimmie could!" he asserted vehemently. "It was just that damn right coming up. Every time Jimmie was dropped, it was a right coming up!"

"Dixon didn't have no right uppercut, that's why Jimmie beat him!" a pool room loafer remarked. "What the hell! A guy can't fight without being hit by something, can he?"

Later, a theatrical company gave a one-night performance in the town, and one of the actors remembered Jimmie Quinlan, and told how he collapsed at the first severe punch after having won all the way.

So Jimmie was never free from impending gossip. At any moment he might be pointed to as a failure in the ring, the man with a glass chin. He drew within himself even more, and became morose and moody.

Once he remarked to Nellie Downs that young and pretty girls didn't have much respect for men who were failures. The girl recognized that he was holding himself from her because he would not offer her a loser.

And then she knew that she loved him more than ever before, and that, in good time, she would have him. Hers would be the joy of dispelling the gloom in which he lived.

A cartoon appeared in one of the city newspapers, and some one cut it out and pasted it on the freight shed wall. It showed several fighters, among them Jimmie Quinlan, and told how these men failed of success in ringdom. They could fight, they could hit, they looked like champions, but they had glass chins, and so passed into the pugilistic discard.

Jimmie tore the cartoon down, and threatened violence to any one who should replace it.

There were boxing gloves in a room behind the pool parlor, and Jimmie never hesitated to referee matches between local talent. The men would strip to the waist, and Jimmie felt the urge to mix with them, to feel again the impact of his glove against another fighter. He was like a great musician without an instrument, a painter without a brush.

With the passing of a year, he had fitted himself again into the normal life of his home town. He had partly lived down the first stinging whispers of gossip. He had shown manhood outside the ring, an ability to work steadily and save a little money, and the stability to conduct himself as a clean-living young man should.

He won the respect and liking of the better class of the town. On occasion he walked to church with Nellie Downs, and the preacher greeted him with marked cordiality. All this seemed to help until the newspapers announced the matching of Dinny Wheeler to defend his welterweight title.

In the same column they stated that the champion would train in the country. He had selected a site for his camp in a town only eight miles from Jimmie and Spike

and Nellie, who had lived down the gossip of the barber and the freight agent and the sewing circle.

With the reading of the announcement, the odor of paint became anathema to Jimmie Quinlan's nostrils. Thought of the metal targets that winked at him in the bright sun, and which corroded almost as fast as he could paint them, sickened him. His overalls, with their brilliant spotting of red lead, struck him as clownish. His interest in his work fled.

The odor of leather and rosin, the thud of blows, the scraping of elk-skin soles over canvas, the clank of the water bucket, the sweeping towel that forced air into his lungs between rounds, all came back to him overpoweringly.

He would rather be a mere sparring partner in the game he loved than a plodding painter of railroad semaphores. He would see the champion at his camp, and ask the boon of sparring with him once more.

With that intention in mind, Jimmie walked into the pool room and called for Spike Martin. They donned the gloves, and the men about the place watched closely as Quinlan began the process of timing, of muscle-loosening exercises.

Spike's eyes glowed with joy. He absorbed punches as a child might reach for candy. Life was coming back to him in full measure. Jimmie had decided to fight again.

Men queried, wondered, gossiped. Jimmie kept silent, but he quit his job at the targets, and avoided Nellie and the questions he knew she must ask. He devoted his time to long runs through the country, to boxing with Spike, and to Spike's ministrations on the rubbing table.

Soon Jimmie's cheeks took on new color, his shoulders squared, his eyes glowed. And one day he was gone from town with Spike, and that same afternoon the people of his home town read that Dinny Wheeler, king of the welterweights, had opened his training camp in the near-by countryside.

VII

THE champion remembered.

He shook Jimmie Quinlan by the hand, and winked a bit condescendingly at Spike Martin. Jimmie told his story in all its simplicity.

"I love the game," he said earnestly.

"There seems to be something inside me that cannot be satisfied in any other way. I've got to box. If I can't fight in the ring, I can at least help real fighters train!"

"Sure you can; you're good, Jimmie," Wheeler assured him. "You block a punch easily, and you can sock. Mebbe we can fix your chin up so it will take a little pasting—but I'm glad to see you, anyhow. I can use you, believe me. But I can't use this trainer of yours!"

The champion laughed a little at the idea of Spike as a fistic mentor.

"How much can you pay me?" Jimmie inquired. "I'll do whatever I can to help."

"Ten bucks a day and chow," Wheeler replied promptly.

"That's fair enough! I take it, starting right now. But make it seven and a half, and feed Spike."

The champion shrugged his willingness to submit to that plan, and one of his handlers showed Spike and Jimmie where they could stow their things. The champion, this man said, did his road work at six in the morning, then the camp was quiet until four in the afternoon, when the gym work and boxing began. He suggested seriously that they both learn to play cribbage and pinochle.

It was glorious to Jimmie to be back in the man-fighting atmosphere. The odors were all there, rampant. Here were the wrinkled and worn ring shoes, the stained ropes and pulleys, the creak of bag swivels, and the tattoo of inflated leather against a hardwood platform. It thrilled Jimmie, and made him forget, for the moment, that he was one who must fade at a punch.

Spike was happy, too. He went about the camp whistling and singing. He rubbed down Jimmie religiously after each work out. He grinned expansively when his charge's natural cleverness kept the champion stepping about the ring during their bouts.

Not only did others admire Martin's loyalty to Jimmie, they grew to like him for his self. Even the champion remarked that he handled Jimmie well in the corner. When some one slyly put rubbing liniment on his piece of pie, Spike took the practical joke in a way that endeared him to the rough lads with whom he lived.

The training camp marked a turning point in Jimmie Quinlan's career. Every one knew he had a glass chin, all believed he never could reach the heights of fistic

fame. But they recognized his boxing ability, and frankly marveled at the way he stepped around a padded ring.

The newspapers remarked that no single thing would help the champion more than the fast rounds he boxed with Jimmie Quinlan. They described the sparring partner as a natural fighter except for his one weak spot. In time he became known to the sports writers as "the glass chin champ."

Men came from his home town and watched him spar with the title holder day after day. Their eyes opened, and they related tales of his prowess while the champion ineffectually used the soft gloves. Even old Tom Morgan was forced to admit that Jimmie certainly looked good "in there."

One day several young women came to view the sparring. Among them was Nellie Downs, and Jimmie boxed as he never had boxed before. He forced the issue until the champion smiled appreciatively, but warned him in a whisper that, should things go farther, he would have to "bring up a right."

And when the training was done, Nellie and Jimmie walked out into the country and watched the sun sink back of the rolling hills. The sky over them faded slowly, like an ember that had burned out. Birds twittered sleepily in the trees.

On a lonely road, under the spell of the young night, Jimmie opened his heart to the girl he adored.

"I never knew anybody like you, Nellie," he said. "Gee! I guess maybe I—well—I guess I love you!"

He caught her hands, and they stopped there in the road and looked at each other in the twilight, and both laughed nervously at the same moment.

"Do you, Jimmie?" she asked softly. "Honest, do you love me?"

"I do. I have for a long time, Nellie. Maybe I hardly knew it myself. Gee! With everybody saying I was—with all that talk about—well—I didn't think I amounted to much! I don't think I do now, but—"

"But you do love me?" she aided him.

"I sure do, Nellie!"

She felt added pressure on her fingers, and wished that he would take her in his arms and hold her close. He did not do that.

"I think you're wonderful, Jimmie,"

she murmured. "You boxed as well as Wheeler to-day. I thought even better!"

Jimmie laughed.

"Don't be fooled, Nellie," he said. "Wheeler could lick me in three rounds. He wears big gloves. He hits me now, but the punches don't weaken me."

"I think you're wonderful, just the same!" she insisted.

"I wish I was a success!" he lamented. The girl knew that she was, for the first time, hearing him open the floodgates of his emotions.

"You are!" she declared, loyally. "Fighting isn't everything. In fact, I'd rather you didn't fight at all!"

"It's in my blood, Nellie. I've got to fight! I love it. You can't understand, I know. There's something about it—and all the money I could have made if I only was a man instead of a weakling."

She drew close to him at the words. About them the shadows hung deep now, and the darkness encouraged her.

"Do you think I could love a weakling?" she demanded, warmly. "How can you say such things?"

Her words seemed to him luminous, emblazoned across the night in letters of fire. She loved him!

Suddenly he caught her close, and she gasped in his fierce embrace. They clung together, there in the quiet night, their hearts beating wildly, their lips clinging.

Presently the girl drew away, and her voice trembled.

"I do love you, Jimmie," she said. "I guess I loved you when you came back to town a failure. I knew you weren't a coward. Everybody knows that now. Even if you can't make good at what you want, you've got the stuff in you that makes a man, and men always succeed sooner or later. We'll just wait—and we'll find a way together!"

They walked slowly back to town, and Jimmie hired a motor car to take Nellie home. The ride through the night was blissful beyond expression.

They talked very little. The car was a small one, and the driver a stranger. But their hands clung all the way, and often Jimmie leaned close and pressed a kiss upon Nellie's lips or cheek.

The driver attempted conversation on the return trip, but Jimmie's silence discouraged him. Back at camp, he told Spike the glorious news of his engagement

to Nellie, and Spike hid his jealousy, and said it was fine, and that soon they would make good in the fighting game.

Two weeks of training passed, and Dinny Wheeler arranged for Jimmie and Spike to be on hand to see the big fight. They went to Terry Jones's place in the city, because that was the only place they knew.

Jimmie found again the shouting mob of fight fans, the white lights that flooded the ring with their illumination, the glistening bodies of fighters garbed only in colorful trunks. He was once more in that environment which called to him irresistibly.

And in that atmosphere, that emotional upheaval which merged with his newborn love of Nellie Downs, Terry Jones came to him as the emissary of a fight manager. There was a chance to make some easy money, perhaps five hundred dollars!

Jimmie listened eagerly. It appeared that the publicity given him as the glass chin champion had borne fruit. Managers could use such a boxer in the building up of their own young fighters' reputations.

The public, Terry pointed out, knew that Jimmie was extremely clever. They knew that he could fight, and that he could hit. He had beaten every man he fought until his glass chin failed him.

It, therefore, followed that any boxer who hit his chin must be a promising one, and there was an excellent chance for Jimmie to become a trial horse for youngsters coming up. Quinlan, having knocked out Mort Dixon and outpointed Shadow White, fight followers would be attracted in anticipation of the big punch.

Well, Terry remarked, what did the public care for Jimmie Quinlan? Just enough to pay their money to see him knocked out!

Then why not take the suckers in? Why not let this manager arrange a match with his unknown and, say in the fourth round, lay down to him? The manager would pay five hundred, the public would be satisfied, and Jimmie would have a roll!

Terry talked to him at great length. He said, and Jimmie felt that he knew, that most preliminary bouts are arranged for the purpose of building up fighters into drawing cards.

Five hundred dollars! There was the start for himself and for Nellie. That amount would establish them in a little rented house, and he could return to target painting if he had to.

He agreed.

That night sleep would not come to him. Spike knew it, and asked about it.

In the quiet of the small, dingy room, Jimmie confided in Spike, and the latter arose from his bed and went to Jimmie and laid a hand on his arm, and they whispered together in the darkness.

"You don't want to do that, Jimmie," Spike said. "Gawd, no! I'd hate to start a girl like Nellie Downs off on crooked money!"

Jimmie writhed under the stress of his emotions. The darkness of night turned into the gray of dawn while they talked.

Spike, it appeared, still believed in Jimmie as a fighter, and saw in him a potential champion. He whispered again and again of guarding against a right coming up, and thus winning fame and riches to offer Nellie Downs.

And in the end, Spike Martin had his way. Before they ate their breakfasts, Jimmie sought out Terry Jones and told him that he had changed his mind, that what fighting he did would be on the level.

Terry took the words placidly, although a gleam of surprise showed in his eyes, and let the matter drop.

For some reason, which Jimmie never could explain, he told Dinny Wheeler the story without mentioning any names. The champion listened silently, his dark brows in a pucker. Presently he said:

"Crooked fighting is a slimy business, kid! I'm glad you didn't take it. Don't ever fall for these smart guys!"

Then he sat down beside Jimmie and talked to him confidentially.

"I never had a glass chin," he began. "I've always heard they can't be fixed, but it's worth a try, Jimmie. If I were you I'd use a head strap to strengthen my neck muscles. They tell me a kayo can be stopped if a guy has a neck tough enough to stop the shock."

"A head strap?" Jimmie asked.

"Sure! You don't see 'em so much since fights have been cut to ten or fifteen rounds. But in the old days all the pugs used 'em. You be around Terry's joint this afternoon about four, and I'll drop in and show you what I mean. It might help a lot."

"I'll be there," Jimmie agreed, eagerly.

"And I'm saying again," Dinny Wheeler declared, "I'm glad you didn't shape up as a fall guy for the wise crowd. Don't

ever do it, Jimmie. Fight to win, or stay outside the ring."

A great peace came to Jimmie after that talk. He sought out Spike, and told him what Wheeler had said. He told of the old-time head strap the champion suggested trying.

Spike nodded happily. He knew that he had been right, and he discovered that Jimmie was seeing things a little more clearly than he had the night before.

They were ready when the champion arrived that afternoon. It was the first time that Terry's place had seen Jimmie in trunks since his sudden departure a year or more before. There were two or three sports writers about the place, looking for a story about the redoubtable Dinny Wheeler.

The champion remained in street clothes, and when it came time for him to demonstrate his theory, he laughingly drew off his belt and coiled it about Jimmie's head. Then he found a weight rope and fastened that to the belt so that it hung down Jimmie's back.

"Here, you!" he called to Spike. "Get hold of this rope. You can make a canvas strap for use all the time, but this 'll show you how to work the racket. Now, Jimmie, bend over and put your hands on the floor."

"That's good stuff, Dinny," Terry Jones called out. "That 'll build up a guy's neck quick!"

Spike held the rope, and Jimmie bent forward.

"Now pull!" the champion instructed. "You, Spike, try to keep from being dragged around this joint. You, Jimmie, try to drag him around."

Jimmie saw the theory of neck strengthening readily enough. He entered into the scheme with the same gusto that characterized all the phases of his training.

He lunged against the rope, and felt Spike put a gradual strain against it. Soon they were tugging earnestly.

Jimmie shot his shoulders forward, straightened his leg muscles, and strained. Suddenly his eyes bulged, his limbs seemed to become paralyzed, his ears drummed, and again he thought himself back in the ring which had seen his two knock-outs.

Nausea assailed him, his muscles refused to function, and he had a hazy sense of falling toward the floor in a vivid flash of light. But there was no vast hand oscil-

lating above him this time; just a giddy helplessness engulfed him.

VIII

JIMMIE returned from his hazy sojourn through the efforts of several watchers with sponges, water buckets, and smelling salts. His first consciousness brought to his ears various remarks.

"He's coming round all right now," Dinny Wheeler announced.

"I thought you broke his damn neck in my joint!" Terry Jones said, aggrievedly.

"He ought to take out a patent on de knock-out!" another voice chimed in. "He's getting so's he goes out widout de sock, now!"

Jimmie saw that one of the sports writers was kneeling beside him, a young and alert man. He was rolling back Jimmie's eyelids, and he spoke authoritatively to Spike, and suggested the manner in which the smelling salts should be used.

Then all was clear again, and Quinlan arose a little unsteadily to his feet, brushing away, in shamefaced manner, the assistance offered him. But the sports writer refused to be waved aside. He held Jimmie's arm, and, with Spike, led him to a bench. When they were seated, he said:

"That was a funny business, Quinlan. You went out like—"

"Just like a right coming up!" Spike interrupted. "That's just the way he goes when they sock him with a right uppercut. It don't seem like a kayo to me."

"But it is," the writer snapped "as clean a kayo as a man could land. However, it's no glass chin, if you a-k me!"

"Then what the devil is it?" Jimmie lamented. "It's just the same as Shadow White handed me, just the same as I felt when Dinny cracked me that first day in here. It's the old kayo."

"I admitted that," the writer said, "but it's not a ring kayo—if you can get my point. I think it's something wrong with the back of your neck. This kid says it's always a right coming up that drops you. That would be exactly the same effect that this strap brought about."

"A kayo is a kayo," Jimmie remarked disconsolately.

"No! It must be your neck. There's something there that somehow shuts off your brain when your head snaps back. The right coming up does it; this rope just did it.

"And I happened to see you drop Mort Dixon. He doesn't hit as hard as some of them, by any means, but you took plenty in that first round. I'll bet a thousand dollars that Dixon can knock you cold right now, if he shoots one up so that your head snaps back.

"Know what I'd do, Quinlan? I'd see a good doctor, and have him look over the back of your neck.

"There's money in this game for you. You can fight like a streak; we all know that. If you can overcome this confounded kayo thing they call a glass chin, you'll make the best of 'em step."

Dinny Wheeler, much impressed by the astonishing scene he had unwittingly staged, remained with Jimmie as he dressed.

"There might be something in what that newspaper guy says," the champion admitted. "But I'll tell you how to find out, easy enough, kid. I'll take you to see Doc Simpson. He examines the fighters for the commission, and he's set my knuckles three times and kept me going when other bone-setters said I was nearly through."

A great hope came to Jimmie Quinlan. His mouth grew dry, his hands trembled as he tied his street shoes.

"How soon could we see him, Dinny?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"I'll call him up now, and let you know!" The champion went downstairs to the public telephone in Jones's place, and Spike crossed the room to Jimmie's side and slipped his arm over his friend's shoulder.

"Gee! Wouldn't it be great? Oh, Jimmie!" Spike managed to say.

Jimmie nodded silently, and they went downstairs to meet Wheeler, who grinned, and said that Dr. Simpson would see them either that evening at seven thirty, or the next morning at ten.

"To-night!" Jimmie exclaimed. "I got to know about this, Dinny. It goes deep with me!"

"I can't go with you to-night," the champion explained, "but that doesn't make any difference. Go on up at seven thirty and let him look you over. I fixed it, kid."

To Jimmie Quinlan, the commission physician was fate itself. Would he find that which Jimmie hoped, or would he say simply: "Glass chin!"

Their turn came in the waiting room among the other patients, and the doctor led them into his office with a genial handshake.

"I think I remember you, Quinlan," he said, "I'm a real fan! I love a good fight between strong, clean youngsters. I thought you'd be champion after I saw you box Dixon; you did a sweet job that night!"

"I was going good just then," Jimmie admitted.

"Dixon couldn't bring up his right," Spike pointed out.

The doctor laughed again, and told Jimmie to sit in a chair with many handles and small arms.

"Wheeler told me what happened at the gymnasium," he said. "A good lad, Dinny. But tell me, as nearly as you can, just how you felt."

Jimmie went into careful details. He explained the drumming in his ears, the blindness and the paralysis that assailed him, then the loss of consciousness.

Dr. Simpson ran sensitive fingers over the back of his patient's neck, while Spike sat breathless, watching the physician's face for any telltale expressions.

"Hurt?" the doctor asked now and then as his fingers shifted from place to place.

"Nope, not yet."

The examination was to be a thorough one. Both strong, skillful hands went to work, and still no pained protest came to their proddings. Then the medical man kept one hand on the back of Jimmie's neck and with the palm of the other against his forehead, he tilted the head backward. Harder and harder, farther and farther, he tilted, and the fingers at the nape of the neck pressed deeper into the flesh.

Jimmie heard the doctor vaguely when he spoke.

"Tell me when you begin to feel funny," he said.

But already the patient was past words. The drumming came, and the blindness—and far in the distance he heard Spike laugh, and it seemed to him there was joy in the tone.

Then he felt himself coming again to consciousness, and he saw that Spike was actually laughing. The doctor was chuckling, too.

"What—what is it?" Jimmie asked, throatily.

"You wouldn't know if I told you, my

boy," the doctor said. "But it isn't a glass chin! How you ever got important bones misplaced like these is beyond me."

"Then—then—can you—fix it, doctor?" Jimmie asked, fearfully.

"We can try. It 'll mean time, son; three months, at least. You'll have to have the bones adjusted first, then frequent manipulation. It isn't a hard job, by any means, but it is a tedious one."

"Gee!" Jimmie grinned at Spike. "I'd stand on my head three months for that!"

The doctor explained how a sudden snapping back of Jimmie's head shut off the blood to his brain, and brought about unconsciousness. Then he set an hour for the next day at which he would adjust the displaced bones.

"I'll write a letter to your own doctor, Quinlan," he said. "I'll tell him just the sort of manipulation you need, and he can do the rest. If I were you, I'd go home and rest this three months, then come back to me before you try to train. And, for heaven's sake, don't attempt to box until the time is up!"

So again Jimmie Quinlan went home. This time news accounts followed him, and there were statements by Dr. Simpson that Jimmie had been the victim of a physical ailment, and that he might recover to enter the ring on even terms with other men.

The home town received the patient as a hero. The village doctor importantly telephoned Dr. Simpson at his own expense, and went over the instructions again.

Then the manipulations began, and Jimmie became a sympathetic figure about the town, his neck and head in the grasp of a steel brace, his eyes alight with a new hope.

Spike took his old job in the freight office, and paid the board bills of both Jimmie and himself. He had the look of a man who calmly waits for proof of that which he knows to be gospel truth. Three months! After all, what are three months?

Jimmie and Nellie permitted their love to be known publicly. The fight he had made, and was now making, became epochal in the little town. Even that portion of the community which disdained ring affairs, nodded to him on the streets, thrilled at the thought that they might be witnesses to one of life's dramas.

Suppose that Jimmie Quinlan should become great? Suppose that he should arise on the wings of sheer courage and soar to the pinnacle of his profession?

Old Tom Morgan sniffed skeptically, but the barber believed in an imminent miracle, and so did the pool room frequenters. Soon the whole town appeared to be waiting for the end of the doctor's treatments and Jimmie Quinlan's new start in the ring.

IX

JIMMIE waited with rare patience for the passing of his probationary period. From the depths of his loyalty and faith, Spike expressed a supreme confidence—Jimmie never.

The fighter carried out every instruction of his physician. He lay motionless on a table for hours while the doctor manipulated his neck.

Twice he went to see Dr. Simpson, who assured him that the adjustment had permanence. There remained only the problem of strengthening cartilages and vertebrae to hold their proper position under shock.

Once Dinny Wheeler wrote him a friendly letter. Again, after the brace had been removed from Jimmie's neck, and he was permitted to undertake light training, Wheeler wrote that he was matched to fight, and that he would send tickets for Spike and Jimmie.

The summer passed into fall, and fall faded into soft snowflakes that disappeared upon contact with the ground. But the flakes were persistent, and one morning Jimmie found a fringe of them along the road over which he did his morning run.

That meant a great deal to him. It suggested the opening of the indoor season of the fight clubs, and the making of better matches. It also was the season of trial, when shortly he would reappear before the thundering throng and test the value of the operation he had banked upon so heavily.

Dinny Wheeler sent him the tickets, and he and Spike went to the city. Jimmie posed with the champion for the newspapers, and boxed a couple rounds, during which Dinny was more than careful with his blows. On the night of the championship fight, Spike and Jimmie occupied ring-side seats.

The newspapers had carried stories of Jimmie's interesting case. He was interviewed by sports writers, and some of them played him up in their columns. The question they propounded was: "Will the glass chin champ come through?"

Dr. Hugh Simpson, prominent in ring af-

fairs, explained the manipulation he had made, and the technical causes of Jimmie's earlier weaknesses. It was stated that Quinlan's first bout would be a test of medical science as well as ring craft.

Promoter McGort came to Jimmie with an offer, and told him to pick his own opponent; any one but Mort Dixon, who could not hit. Jimmie gave his promise to fight for McGort, but refused to name a date until he saw Dr. Simpson.

That night, at the ringside, he witnessed the fall of gallant Dinny Wheeler from the pinnacle of pugilism. The challenger beat Dinny all the way.

That sudden, inexplicable transition from greatness to mediocrity in the ring, seized upon the king. He fought the last three rounds solely on heart and courage. So passed another champion in a smear of his own gore, smiling through physical collapse, and defying the defeat which engulfed him in its inevitable tide.

Jimmie watched his benefactor go with a strange mixture of emotions. In those terrible rounds when Dinny reeled along the ropes, grinning with bloody lips, battling he knew not how, making a last desperate stand against the impending knockout, Jimmie discovered that he had a real affection for this fighting man. Wheeler seemed greater in defeat than ever in victory.

When the last bell had rung, and Dinny still was erect, the crowd gave him his final acclaim. He nodded understandingly when the announcer pointed toward the corner of the new champion.

It was the way of the ring. His own hour had struck. The morning papers announced that Wheeler had left town at once for some quiet place in the country.

Spike and Jimmie saw Dr. Simpson, who said that Jimmie could fight as soon as he liked. They returned home, and Quinlan wrote McGort to match him.

He made no mention of purse. What he sought was the great test. He suggested as an opponent Shadow White, who had knocked him out.

McGort saw the point. In three days he wired Jimmie that the match was made for two weeks hence, that it would be the semifinal bout, and that Quinlan's end would be three hundred dollars.

Jimmie went into rugged training. He left himself open to the upward swinging right of Spike.

Time and again the blows crunched against his chin, but he withstood their force. Spike was hitting hard. Jimmie's head would snap back, and occasionally his eyes would glaze for an instant when the punch landed.

His confidence grew. The conviction came to him that he would win, that he could not be knocked out in a single terrific punch to the chin.

A week before the fight a surprising statement was carried in the papers. Dinny Wheeler had returned to town, and said that he was through with fighting, that he had saved his money and was financially independent.

But he declared, also, that his interest in boxing never would cease, and that, although the new champion was a fighter in every respect, and had his best wishes for success, there was a man who could beat him with proper training.

That boxer, Dinny Wheeler asserted, was none other than Jimmie Quinlan. All hinged, however, on the effectiveness of the operation Dr. Simpson had performed.

Jimmie bade Nellie good-by the day before the fight. Before a large group of well-wishers who had gathered at the station to see him off, she held his hands, looked into his eyes, and then kissed his lips.

"You'll win, Jimmie," she announced. "You'll be great—and please come back to me as soon as you can!"

With that encouragement to inspire him, with the joy that Nellie promised, Jimmie had ample for which to fight. He went to Terry Jones's place, rested the night before the bout, worked out lightly at the pulleys the morning of the battle, and slept during the afternoon.

How good it was to hear the voice of the throng as he entered the ring, but how mixed was opinion! Some cheered him loudly, others made catcalls and yelled uncomplimentary remarks about the "glass chin champ!"

The Shadow crossed the ring to shake Quinlan's hand. The Western man was confident—as confident as Jimmie.

The bout had created as much interest and comment as the main event to follow. Under the glare of lights, and amid the drifting cloud of tobacco smoke that filled the arena, the two received instructions from the referee.

Shadow White met Jimmie squarely at

the bell. He snapped a left for the head, and missed. The crowd gasped in anticipation as White swept a right uppercut for the doubtful chin.

It was a wicked blow, carrying everything behind it that the Shadow possessed in the way of strength and timing. But it missed.

Jimmie slipped the blow easily, and before White could recover his position, Jimmie's own right lashed out, and the glove crashed cleanly against the Shadow's chin.

White staggered backward, his eyes rolling. Before he could fall, Jimmie's left had hooked also to the chin.

White was counted out before the wondering eyes of the crowd. Then a wild cheer greeted this great come-back of the victor. Dinny Wheeler appeared at Spike's corner and greeted him.

But Jimmie was somewhat disconsolate. Even as the ex-champion pumped his arm up and down in congratulation, he said:

"It doesn't mean a thing, Dinny! He never hit me. I knew I could box. I knew I could hit. But he played the fool tonight. He staked everything on a punch, and got knocked out for his trouble. What I wanted to know was—can I take it?"

In the dressing room Wheeler had more to say.

"Doc Simpson tells me you're O. K., Jimmie. I know you're game. I pisted you plenty when I was right. You need a few tricks; you need experience and teaching. I'll give it all to you, kid. Sign up with me as manager. I want a third split on the gate, and we'll divide expenses. I'll make a champ of you, Jimmie!"

At Terry Jones's that night, Jimmie talked at length with Spike. They came to an agreement.

The next morning they were awakened by a telephone call from McGort. They could work the very next week, he said, at four hundred, he to pick the opponent at weight.

Jimmie deferred acceptance until later in the day. Then he got Dinny Wheeler, and they went to the office of the Boxing Commission, and there made a year's managerial contract. That afternoon Dinny cooked up a match with McGort, and when he returned to catch the train for Jimmie's home, he grinned his satisfaction.

"We're fixed with a push-over for you, Jimmie!" he announced. "You'll take this bird the way you did the Shadow. We get

six hundred in the main bout, too. What's publicity for, I ask you?"

"But—" Jimmie began.

"But nothing! You want to find out about that glass chin, I suppose. Well, I'm goin' to train with you, too. I'll paste that mug of yours till we find out, believe me, kid!"

Nellie Downs met them at the train. The gladness of her welcome gripped the hearts of the home town crowd. They cheered Jimmie, and he smiled a little. Few noticed that his expression otherwise was inscrutable.

Far down the track he saw signal targets, and there was a man on the structure with a paintbrush in his hand.

X

JIMMIE QUINLAN went to the city for his second bout after the operation. He found the fight an easy task. His opponent, a man of whom he never had heard, was less of a problem from a fighting standpoint than Shadow White had been.

But there was one feature of the bout which stood out in Jimmie's mind. It was plain to him that some one had prepared the other man for a great effort. He was incessantly trying to reach Jimmie with a right uppercut to the chin.

The first few minutes of combat showed the rejuvenated "glass chin champ" that the fight was his at his own bidding—but that was not what he wanted. After the first round, Dinny Wheeler said to him: "When are you going to sock this bum? You've had a flock of chances!"

But Jimmie had an intriguing idea, a foolhardy, daring plan. He intended to let his opponent hit him with the right hand. He would find out once and for all if the snapping back of his head produced the dreaded nausea.

The punch landed.

Jimmie, merely shaken, and wholly overjoyed, felt none of the old effects of such a blow.

He did what Dinny had begged him to do. At the opening of the third round he darted forth to bring about the instant defeat of his man.

He fainted with his left, then with his right, then again with his left. The man opposite him was bewildered, uncertain. In that moment when he hurriedly raised his arms as a cover, Jimmie found his chance.

His right lashed forth in something other than a feint. The blow landed, just as it had on Shadow White.

There was no doubt of the result. The crowd was cheering before the stricken boxer had struck the floor. The referee counted him out without so much as a stir from his paralyzed limbs.

Again Jimmie had the experience of carrying a vanquished foe to his corner. Again he heard the cheers of the throng—and heard them with ears that did not drum.

That was the beginning of a campaign that carried Jimmie Quinlan into the hearts of thousands of fans. Other fighters nodded wisely at mention of his name, and agreed that "he had the stuff." The fame of Dr. Hugh Simpson spread, and newspapers were liberal with the space given Jimmie and his pugilistic future.

Dinny Wheeler took the lad in hand as only he could do. In the gymnasium which they fitted up in Jimmie's hometown, the ex-champion initiated his charge into the tricks of elbows and shoulders and head. He showed him how to make every move count toward the desired end, how to conserve his energy, how to "rest" at an antagonist's expense if the going became rough.

And day after day, under the guidance of Dinny, Jimmie's knowledge grew. He learned to hit straight, short, damaging punches, and to weave across a ring in a manner that baffled even Wheeler.

The older man gave of his best in the training of the corner. He taught him to slip along the ropes when in danger, to roll with a punch that could not be avoided, or one which he was willing to take for the sake of landing a sharp counter.

Old Tom Morgan, a born irreconcilable, grew glum as Jimmie's merit became obvious. Time and again Wheeler brought up his powerful right and connected with the lad's chin, and Jimmie's head snapped back in a way that formerly would have rendered him unconscious. And each time he stood the punch, and grinned, and countered with the speed of lightning.

Dinny Wheeler was happy in the vindication of his judgment as the progress of his protégé carried them into semifinals, and then on to the main bouts at McGort's club. They made money, and Jimmie declared a further split of the purses. The agreed one-third went to Dinny Wheeler,

and one-third of the remainder to the faithful Spike.

Nellie Downs's face showed a vast pride in Jimmie. She did not like the fight game, and she said so, often. But when the lad began laying away money in hundred-dollar amounts, she saw that happiness might come to them through the game—so she did not object very strongly.

Dinny proved himself a capable manager as well as tutor. He knew how to extract the last dollar in purses from promoters, and then to add a percentage possibility in case the house exceeded expectations. He knew the sort of boxers against whom Jimmie would show best, and before the opening of the lucrative outdoor season he had brought him along to where he was mentioned as a contender for the welterweight crown.

Spike, faithful as ever, had nevertheless grown reticent. In the rush of success, and the rapidity of Jimmie's upward climb on the fistic ladder, he found fewer opportunities to talk with his friend. Dinny Wheeler knew so much more than Spike that the latter felt the futility of interference with the routine.

But he rubbed Jimmie with the same almost maternal care, and his eyes shone with pride and joy from the ring corner each time Jimmie fought.

On more than one occasion during those months, Jimmie's courage was tested. Once he walked into a right-hand punch that dropped him in his tracks.

But he was up at the count of four and fighting with a viciousness that drove all opposition before him. He came from behind that night, and established himself even more firmly in the hearts of admirers of gameness.

Dinny went to Chicago during the late winter, and wired back that he had secured two bouts for Jimmie, with others to come. Jimmie and Spike journeyed westward and more than made good.

Jimmie was gone a month, boxing three times during that period. He won one bout by a knock-out, and two easily on points.

Dinny now taught him the art of saving his hands. The ex-champion now believed in the practice of a fighter showing just enough to win handily, placing no value on a knock-out unless the chance to deliver it came clean and sure.

"Don't bust a hand just to set a boy down, Jimmie!" he warned. "When these

lads go the route with you, it builds 'em up in their own home town—and you can get 'em again. Remember you're fighting for the money—not for glory!”

Jimmie became a profitable fighting machine, and his earnings mounted. By the time the open arena season arrived, he had laid away five thousand dollars, and he felt that Nellie and he could marry soon.

Then, for the first time, he noticed the difference in Spike Martin's attitude. His best friend seemed morose, hidden away behind a mental screen.

There was something, Jimmie saw, that threatened to come between them. Spike still was loyal, and earnest in his method of keeping the fighter's muscles soft and pliable, but he was changed, none the less.

“What's up, Spike?” Jimmie asked bluntly one day when they were alone. “You ain't a bit like your old self.”

“Nothing!” Spike grinned, defensively. “Nothing's the matter, Jimmie.”

But the fighter knew something was wrong, and he mentioned it to Nellie that evening when they sat on her porch. The girl laughed a little bitterly.

“Of course Spike is changing,” she said. “Why not? You are changing, too, Jimmie. I don't mean to criticize, but you are not the same. Dinny Wheeler has changed you. I guess maybe it's because Spike is a little—well, jealous.”

“Jealous!” Jimmie cried. “That's foolish! Jealous of Dinny? Why, Dinny has made me; he knows every trick in the game.”

“Of course,” the girl hastened to say, “I'm saying nothing against Dinny! But he has changed you, honey. Everything has changed you. You don't seem happy over winning any more.”

“Happy—when I win?” With a mystified expression he turned inquiringly to Nellie, as though she had opened a new line of thought and he was groping to adjust his mind to it.

She laid her hand on his and laughed upward into his face. But he caught a tense note in her voice.

“Silly!” she said, nervously. “Can't you see that Spike thinks all the world of you? He always has. You are a sort of a—god to him, Jimmie—a hero.”

“But we started out to make money, dear,” Jimmie reminded her. “Now that we are doing it, I don't see where Spike should be jealous because Dinny helps us.

Look at the matches he gets me, and the purses. Without him I wouldn't make half what I do now—and neither would Spike!”

“You don't see it, Jimmie,” the girl said quietly. “I've noticed it for some time. I think I understand it. But I know that you don't—and can't!”

“Understand what?” Jimmie asked, a little irritably. “I don't see what you're—”

“Of course you don't!” Nellie laughed. She leaned forward and lightly kissed his cheek.

But he was not to be put aside. He caught her hand, and she felt the purposeful pressure of his fingers on her own.

“Tell me,” he commanded, “just what you are driving at, dear. I've got a right to know. I'm doing my best. I'm winning, and I'm giving Spike more money than he ever earned before. I've got a right to know what's the matter with him.”

“There is nothing really the matter with him, Jimmie! It's just that you two have changed. You were both supreme in failure, Jimmie! I loved you in failure. Spike loved you in failure. You showed such a fine courage then, Jimmie! And you were so forlorn, and needed help so much.”

“You gave it to me, Nellie!” Jimmie declared huskily.

“And now you are successful and don't need help, and it makes a very great difference, though, of course, I'm awfully glad you are succeeding—as I always knew you would.”

Jimmie ran a somewhat helpless hand through his hair. The girl saw that he did not grasp her meaning very clearly. She went on:

“Spike loved seeing you fight, Jimmie. He loved knowing that you could fight, and every second that you fought he was in there fighting with you. He wanted you to win, because you were Jimmie, not because he wanted money. It's hard to make you see it—but I see it! Spike is one of the finest men I ever knew—and he loves you. And now Dinny has brought you to the success of which Spike never had more than hazy dreams. That's all!”

Jimmie remained silent for awhile, then shrugged his heavy shoulders in a gesture of mystification.

“You must be right,” he said; “you always are. But I don't see where Spike has a kick coming.”

"Has he made any kick, Jimmie?" she asked softly.

"No! But what you say—"

"I shouldn't have said it," Nellie interrupted swiftly. "But I like Spike, and I love you. I know that he was jealous of me for a time, because I had a share in you. I presume he feels the same way about Dinny. But please remember this: there is no room for a woman in the friendship of two men!"

"That's news to me, Nellie!"

"Well, sooner or later a girl comes between them. And she never means to! She sees things differently, that's all. And neither of the men could see it her way. So forget what I said about Spike. You and he work out your own problem, Jimmie. I think the world of both of you, and I'm sorry now that I spoke."

"We'll just let it drop there," Jimmie announced.

But he knew there was wisdom in her words. Spike loved him as a hero, and Dinny merely used him as a fighting machine to make them both money.

Dinny Wheeler loved fighting for itself. Spike Martin loved Jimmie Quinlan's fighting. That was the vast difference.

Dinny, when the hour of defeat struck for Jimmie, would take it as he had taken his own defeat, almost casually; a thing to be expected, inevitable. And Wheeler would count success in dollars, and so he and Quinlan would drift apart.

Spike would take that defeat as a personal blow. He cared little or nothing for the money he got. He loved Jimmie first and fighting second.

When Jimmie ceased to be a great fighter, he would still be the same old Jimmie to Spike. And the two would retire together into the glory of recollections in a faded fame.

There would be, to Spike, only the difference of a word. Instead of speaking in terms of the present, he would boast of the past—and always Jimmie would be great to him.

The fighter thought for a long time in silence. And the girl wisely remained silent with him, her fingers clinging to his hand.

The lad looked past the portals of the present. He faced the problem of making his fortune, and hers, in three, or four, or perhaps five years.

He realized that one chance blow in the

ring might throw him back upon the love of Nellie and Spike, with all the rest of the world heedless and uncaring. The truth created a certain resentment in his mind toward the great crowds that saw him fight.

"I've started, Nellie," he said finally, "and I'm going to keep on. Spike is fine, as you say—but Dinny is right! Dinny has traveled the road I must go. He knows how to get the crowds; he knows the fate of a loser. It isn't his fault; neither is it mine."

"I understand, Jimmie!"

"As long as people pay huge prices to see a fight, just so long will the money end rule everything. I started fighting for a love of fighting—and I still love it. But now I'm going to fight to win, to get every dollar I can, and to save myself all the punishment I can."

"Yes, Jimmie!"

"Then, when my speed goes, and I weaken under the battering, I'll quit and sit back and laugh at those who have laughed at me! I'll save my money, and when the day comes when I drop, then you and I can laugh—and so can Spike. After that he'll see it in the right light, too."

Jimmie arose, and Nellie clung to him tenderly. Neither spoke the thought in their minds.

To Jimmie, Spike seemed, suddenly, tremendously important in his life. Something had gone which he valued greatly.

Nellie kissed him good night and patted his cheek encouragingly. There was more in the gesture than her words could have conveyed.

XI

JIMMIE QUINLAN stood by his decision to make of his profession a money-making venture.

Dinny Wheeler was a married man, and had a little boy of whom he was infinitely proud. He brought his wife and son to Jimmie's home town, and rented a small house. The child played about the training quarters, and the fighter grew to love him not a little.

It was on the porch of Dinny's house that Jimmie liberated the thought which filled his mind. He had grown taciturn, and Dinny, being a man who understood fighters, watched his work closely. Now Jimmie spoke, and the ex-champion smiled in appreciation and understanding.

"This is a tricky game, Dinny," the lad said. "How long did you hold the belt?"

"Four years," Dinny replied. "I was in the game seven."

"Four years—that ain't very long," Jimmie said slowly. "If a guy like me gets his money out of the game, he's got to do it fast."

"You said it! Look at my mug! I've got a bent nose and a tin ear. A guy can't sell ribbon over a counter with a dial like mine! I'm glad I'm set, and got a wife that'll take care of my dough."

"I was thinking about that very thing," Jimmie declared. "One punch might set a guy flat on his back any time."

They were both silent for a time, and Dinny calmly lit a cigar. But from beneath his battered brows his sharp eyes danced. When the cigar was going to his satisfaction, he said:

"You've got a lot of sense for a kid, Jimmie. Save all the dough you can. We've got to plan to clean up in the sticks, by the way. But you're a queer kid! Sometimes I think you don't care much for the money, as if you'd be content to fight for the fun of it—if any!"

"Spike's the same way," Jimmie replied.

"Uh, huh! I noticed that. It's a fine thing—and you don't want to lose it, kid. But how about the dough?"

"I'd like to get the money while I can," Jimmie answered. "That's what counts, I suppose. But I'd like to keep straight, too."

"You bet! No faked fights!" the champion asserted, vehemently. "I never put one in, Jimmie! Every fight I ever had was on the up and up!"

"That's the way I want to be."

"Sure. But there are ways and ways of working the fight racket!" Dinny explained. "You're getting a bit of a rep', now. The papers are calling you a contender. You ain't that, yet! I wouldn't let you box Grover right now for ten grand!"

Wheeler leaned forward to speak, and there was a world of sincerity in his tone and manner. After a moment he went on:

"But there's a lot in being a contender, kid! There's dough in it—real dough! We ought to rig up a trip through the sticks, as I said. Every little town has its champ, you know. We can make a business of knocking over the local prides.

We'll have to kick in with a split to small town sports writers, but we'll put the cleaners to a roll, I'll lay to that!"

"There's money in the sticks?" Jimmie asked.

"Sure! These small towns are full of it. I'll write a lot of guys I know and get them to start a ballyhoo for you to meet the local champs. We hit the burg on a guarantee of seven fifty to fifteen hundred bucks."

"Sounds good, Dinny!"

"Sure! The ballyhoo packs 'em in on fight night to see the town's hero get a big shot at fame. Then we carry him along and make a pretty fight of it, and go on to the next town."

"Easy!"

"Sure! That's what you need, too. Plenty of fights, kid; lots of experience. Give me a year of that, and I'll toss you in with Grover at a big open-air show!"

"He's good, Dinny!"

"Well, all you got to do meanwhile is watch your hands. Don't knock these push-overs goofy just because you can! Save your hands. Box the route, unless you're hurt or tired. Give the local boys a chance to shine, too! They're the guys that're paying the freight!"

"Go ahead, Dinny," the fighter said. "I know what it is to have the crowd laugh at me—now let me have a laugh at them! Fix it up anyway you say—and as soon as you can."

"We ought to shove off in two weeks," Dinny smiled happily. "If we stay out six months, Jimmie, we'll pick up twenty-five thousand smackers easy!"

"We'll stay out," Jimmie declared. "Go ahead and fix it up, Dinny."

"I will—but keep what I said just between us two. I wouldn't even tell Spike the big idea. All he knows is that we're fighting, see?"

Jimmie nodded, understandingly.

Now and then, in the succeeding two weeks, Dinny would mention that he had heard from a town fight promoter, and would soon have a schedule mapped out.

Once he showed Jimmie pictures and news items from a city in the Middle West. The print told of Jimmie's marvelous comeback, thanks to medical science. The pictures were of himself in fighting postures.

It was stated that Quinlan might soon appear in town against the welterweight local champion. The prophecy was made

that he would need all his skill to hold his own against the mitts of the native pride.

Dinny winked at Jimmie, and laughed. The guarantee was a thousand dollars in that town, but they should take nearly twice that amount on a percentage basis.

Jimmie trained faithfully. He spoke of his impending absence to Nellie, and the girl took the news with smiling courage, saying merely that she would be lonely, and hoped that he would not be gone very long.

"It's for you I'm going, Nellie," he said. "I've got to make money fast. Then you and I can get a little place, like Dinny has—and maybe—well, he's got little Johnnie, hasn't he?"

"Jimmie!" The girl's voice was very tender.

"Gee! Wouldn't that be great, Nellie? Maybe right here in town we could build our own home, and I could have a regular business, and we'd live here, happy and comfortable."

When Spike was told of the trip, he grinned joyfully.

"Once let them hicks see you work, and the whole country will be hollering fer a title match for you, Jimmie!" he said, confidently. "You'll beat Grover, too!"

On their departure there was a demonstration at the station, showing the pride of the men of the town over Jimmie Quinlan, the fighter and the citizen.

His first bout was in a city three hundred miles west, and Dinny had seen to it that plenty of publicity had been given out. A hearty welcome to the invader was the crowd's offering.

Later the newspapers told the home folk that Jimmie had won an easy decision over the boxer he met, and had gone farther west to meet another man. A week after the first bout he fought again, and again won on points. Spike wrote to his friends to tell them of the masterful fighter.

Dinny handled the business end, and advised Jimmie from the corner during bouts. Spike cared for the rubbing and the diet. They had three bouts the first month out, and Jimmie increased his bank account by two thousand dollars.

In the second month Jimmie performed the amazing feat of fighting five times and winning all the bouts handily. The last one, a ten-round match, he won by a knock-out in the fifth round.

That night Wheeler asked him why he

had risked his knuckles with lucrative matches ahead of him. The fighter told him quite frankly:

"I was getting tired, Dinny. I felt myself going, and there was a hurt in every punch that guy landed."

Immediately the three went into the country and rested at a small hotel for two weeks, Dinny postponing matches right and left, with utter disregard for the promoters' plans. The papers carried announcements that Jimmie had a stomach ailment, and was obliged to have the care of a physician.

Nellie, reading this in the papers, wired for facts, and Jimmie wrote her that nothing was wrong, except he had overworked, and Dinny felt it wise to remain out of the ring until he was right. He said that the illness was an invention, for the benefit of sports writers who might otherwise criticize his postponements.

His letter said:

And, believe me, sweetheart, this is the way to get money fast. I won't need much more of this kind of business before we can give the crowd the big laugh. I've already sent home five thousand dollars to the bank.

When I get back we will get married, if you will, and get that house right away.

But out in the West one of the trio was miserable. Spike knew there was something the matter with Jimmie. He could see it.

The old snap seemed to have faded from the fighter's punches, the glide of his weave appeared less perfect, there was a mechanical air about his work.

Spike blamed himself a little. Perhaps he was failing to keep Jimmie in perfect condition.

But Dinny Wheeler gave no sign of concern. He was entirely pleased, in fact. When he spoke of the lay off, he merely said that Jimmie didn't realize what experience was doing for him.

"You're saving yourself pretty, kid," he announced. "There's none of the wasted moves you used to have."

But the "wasted moves" had been the things Spike loved! To see Jimmie dart forth to battle with the enthusiasm of a pit-bred terrier was a thrill to Spike.

Now Jimmie cautiously met his man, fed him straight lefts or hooks, figured out the opponent's style, and then toyed with him. Spike could not understand this.

Time and again he saw Jimmie hold back

a punch that would have settled things. Occasionally he saw him, stung by a glancing blow, back away!

In the old days Jimmie would have charged in, as he had with Mort Dixon. To sting Jimmie now was to make him more careful, almost a defensive fighter.

They went on after the period of rest. Jimmie was working like a well-oiled machine of destruction using only half its power. His blows were timed, straight, and frequent.

But his antagonists stood up under them. He punched more because he knew the crowd wanted to see him punch than he did to gain the victory.

The zest of the game seemed gone to Jimmie Quinlan. He fought mechanically to win, and he always won.

Slowly it dawned upon Spike that here was the purpose of the trip—just money. Glory had no part in the management of Dinny Wheeler. All crowds were suckers to Dinny and Jimmie. All results were solely financial.

Jimmie was letting men stay ten rounds with him when he could have dropped them in one.

There was something about this which Spike could not tolerate. Aside from his love of Jimmie, he worshiped the strength of his friend, the catlike speed, the uncanny ability to fight.

It seemed to him now that these things were being soiled. He was sick at the thought, but he remained silent.

Jimmie scarcely ever talked business to Spike. After his bouts he promptly split the money, and laughed with boyish delight when Spike told him that he, too, had saved a big bank roll.

Quinlan conferred mostly with Dinny Wheeler, the master mind of the trio. Spike did little but box a bit with Jimmie, and rub him and swing the towel in his corner between rounds.

In one bout Jimmie received a cut eyebrow. Dinny and Spike did all that they could for it, but the next bout occurred too soon for the wound to heal. Quinlan entered the ring with a plaster over his brow.

In a clinch this protection was rubbed off, and iodine only partly stayed the flow of blood. Jimmie knocked his man out in the fourth round that night, but the wound was opened more, and two stitches had to be taken in it. Spike knew that Jimmie was marked for life.

The cut was tender for weeks, and before they returned home that damaged eyebrow hung a trifle low, and gave Jimmie's face a twisted look. But they carried on, and soon his savings mounted to fifteen thousand dollars.

Jimmie talked much of the homeward journey and his wedding. Nellie had written that she would marry him when he returned, if it seemed best at that time.

Of course it would seem best! Why not?

Dinny saw to it that the press associations carried news of Jimmie's many victories. His reputation spread over the country, and when they reached the Pacific coast, they had little difficulty in making good matches.

In his first fight out there, Jimmie lost a decision. Spike suffered untold agonies during that bout.

Jimmie had his man at his mercy at least a dozen times during the first three rounds. Spike knew that Jimmie could have measured him with his famous right cross. He told Jimmie this between rounds, and warned him that the other man was a hard hitter.

But Dinny Wheeler laughed.

"He telegraphs his punches, Jimmie!" he said. "He couldn't hit you with a handful of beans. Don't bust a hand in a short fight!"

Jimmie became careless, and the hitter landed. Quinlan fell under the blow, and just managed to weather the round that followed. A patriotic referee gave the Coast man the decision, and the local papers made much of his victory over the Easterner.

For awhile the battling spirit seemed to return to Jimmie. He pleaded for a return engagement, and the promoters promptly agreed.

"That's the stuff!" Dinny said, amusedly. "Keep 'em coming! Don't paste him this time, either! Outpoint him, and we'll rib up a rubber match. Then you can sock him whenever you're ready. This is real money we're dragging down, eh, boys?"

Spike Martin made no comment. He rubbed Jimmie as usual that night, took his share of the purse, then went to his hotel room and packed his things.

At the desk in the lobby he labored long with a letter to Jimmie. This he left downstairs, slipping furtively from the place, for

fear either Jimmie or Dinny might meet him.

The next morning Jimmie got the letter, and his brows knitted as he read it. It said:

JIMMIE:

I am ducking for home because I ain't doing you any good no more. If I was you I would fight harder and never mind the hands. I will tell Nellie how fine you are doing and all like that.

Good luck to you, Jimmie.

SPIKE.

XII

JIMMIE QUINLAN read the brief note with mixed emotions, the chief being amazement. His mind went back to his various talks with Spike.

He recalled what Nellie had said about the change in them both. He realized more forcefully than ever how much he cared for Spike.

It was several minutes before he grasped the import of Martin's action. His friend had left him! The note said nothing of the reason for his leaving.

The Spike who had trailed him through those dreary days at Terry Jones's place had deserted the cause! For no apparent reason, he had slunk away as if in shame. Why?

Jimmie went to the telegraph office and wired to Nellie, asking that she have Spike return at once. Then he checked up on trains, and found the Overland, which his friend must have taken. He wired Spike aboard the train at a city two hundred miles away.

After that he went to Dinny and showed him Spike's note. The ex-champion shrugged his broad shoulders and smiled.

"I always told you he was a queer one, Jimmie!" he said. "I'd call him an awful sucker. Think of the dough he's passing up! You should worry! We can hire a rubber for two bucks a day."

"But why did he go?" Jimmie asked, worriedly. "What's the big idea? He never said a thing about being sore at anything. I've played the game with him all the way."

"Forget it!" Dinny advised. "He'll be damned sorry when he thinks it over. I guess it's because you dropped a decision to that bum!"

They had their breakfast, and Dinny did his best to cheer up the fighter and take his mind off Spike's departure. But the world was a blue place for Jimmie. When he went to the gymnasium to work

out he was noncommittal, and morose, if not unfriendly.

In his mind were memories of all that Spike had been to him. The thought uppermost in his groping was that Spike never would have left without good reason.

Suddenly, Jimmie Quinlan was homesick. He yearned to return to see Nellie Downs, and to talk with Spike. He would try to straighten out the difficulty which had sprung up between them in the last year or so.

He recalled the way Spike had talked to him that night at Terry's place. His friend kept him from making of himself a faker, a trial horse whose knock-out could be purchased by any cunning manager.

All that he was, he owed to Spike. All that he had, he never could have got had Spike not shown him the right way that night.

Dinny told Jimmie that day that they would fight the same man in a week. He reiterated that only a decision should be gained, and Jimmie, his heart heavy and his mind upon the mounting bank account, nodded agreement.

By way of pointing out the blessings which had come to them, Dinny spent that evening in going over the sums of money they had made. It helped.

Jimmie saw quite clearly that he was on the high road to independence. And now that Spike was out, his own savings would be larger.

Yes, he would continue to box for money. He never would sell a fight, but he would make three bouts out of what might easily be one, and that meant three purses.

Then, when he was through as a fighter, there would come the house like Dinny had, and Nellie, his wife, and maybe, as he had told her, a little Jimmie to gladden his heart. Surely, much money would be needed to give his son all that he would deserve.

The boy never should be a fighter, of course. Big Jimmie would get the money now.

Maybe the little fellow would become a lawyer, or a doctor—anything he wanted, except a fighter. He must go to college, of course.

Therefore, big Jimmie would fight with the dollar sign in mind. He would not cripple his hands just yet. By the time little Jimmie grew up, his father's fighting days would be forgotten, anyway.

Wheeler was a wise counselor, Jimmie

told himself. Dinny knew the value of the money that was coming so fast to them.

And Nellie knew that Jimmie was fighting for her. Even Spike would see it when the home was built, and he could come to see them and laugh over the things that were happening right now.

Noon came and passed, with no answer from Spike. Jimmie feared that he might have played too close with the train, so he sent a second wire to a point two hundred miles beyond the first city.

Lunch was a semibusiness affair with Dinny and the promoters. Wheeler insisted on an increased purse for the return match.

He pointed out that Jimmie had a national fistic reputation, and to risk a second battle was worth more money, both to his fighter and the fight customers. There would have to be another referee, too.

Dinny had his way. The purse was increased, and the newspapers were worked for publicity on the score of a grudge fight.

Jimmie knew that he could stop this Coast fighter almost at will. He smiled to himself at Dinny's clever methods. The promoters really conceded the local man a chance to win again.

It would be easy, Jimmie saw, to carry this man through another bout, and then knock him out in a third meeting. Dinny was smart.

The afternoon papers played up the return match. The local man, the sports writer said, was looking upon the greatest opportunity of his life. They went so far as to coach him on the particular style of battle he should pursue against the vindictive Easterner.

That day passed miserably for Jimmie. There had been no word from Spike, neither had Nellie answered his wire.

Jimmie was aggrieved, and he did not know exactly why. After all, he mused, if that was the way Spike felt—

But there was hollow satisfaction in the knowledge of his increased share in the purses. Jimmie had to admit there was none who could take Spike's place.

The next morning a telegram came from Nellie, promising to ask Spike to return.

The day of the fight dawned. Jimmie had no anxiety over the battle, but there was another worry attached to this date. Spike would reach home that day, too. He would see Nellie, and she would ask about Jimmie—and what might Spike say?

He was sorry, now, that he had wired to Nellie. The telegram would warn her that Spike had left Jimmie because he was angry.

She would question Spike accordingly. What would Spike say?

As usual, Jimmie slept during the afternoon of fight day, but his sleep was fretful. At least Spike could have answered his wire!

Jimmie thought that Nellie might wire him when Spike arrived. There was a big difference in time between the East and the West, and he might hear from her almost any hour.

Dinny aroused him at four o'clock, and he ate poached eggs on toast and drank a cup of cocoa. From then on there was nothing to do but rest until ring time.

Dinny gave him some more good financial advice, and Jimmie nodded agreement. They planned to leave town after Jimmie had won the decision, and then return in a month for the final purse and the knock-out of the Coast man.

At six o'clock Jimmie received the anticipated wire. He expected it would be from Nellie, and his fingers shook a little as he opened the envelope.

His first glance showed him that the message had been sent from his home town. Old Tom Morgan would have read the copy of it by this time!

Then a little cry burst from his lips. Dinny turned curiously toward him.

Nellie had not sent the wire! It was from Spike, and it read:

I WILL NOT COME BACK WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE IF YOU ARE AFRAID TO BREAK A HAND OR AFRAID TO BE KNOCKED OUT OR AFRAID TO TRY TO MAKE A LIVING OUTSIDE THE RING THEY ARE ALL THE SAME YOU ARE YELLOW. SPIKE

XIII

JIMMIE QUINLAN did not show the wire to his manager. He folded it into the palm of his hand, where it seemed to him to sear the flesh.

He felt shamed, degraded. It did not occur to him to doubt the justice of Spike's charge, nor was he angry with his friend.

What stood out above all else in his mind was the old charge of "yellow." Now it came from the one man whose faith in his courage had hitherto been unshaken.

The old complex asserted itself in Jimmie's psychology. He felt himself a fail-

ure. He was a prey to the despair whose depths he had plumbed before.

Wheeler assumed that the wire was from Nellie, and that she was quarreling with Jimmy at long distance.

"Gawd knows, I love my wife," Dinny said casually, "but there isn't anything on earth that 'll coax a shot on the chin quicker than a fighter in love! Watch your step with this bum, and don't be sleeping at the switch!"

Jimmie smiled painfully. Wheeler's words had been unfortunate. The reference to a "switch" carried the fighter back to his days of railroad signal painting, and the quiet hours he had spent with Nellie before the manipulations which had made him a winning boxer.

He felt at the moment that he would gladly take the paint pots and brushes, the odors of turpentine and red lead, if Spike could understand.

Dinny and Jimmie taxied to the fight club about nine that night. They prepared for the ring in a leisurely manner, and kept the other fighter waiting nearly five minutes for their appearance. When they climbed through the ropes, Jimmie hurried across the ring and perfunctorily shook the Coast man's hand.

The words in that telegram were burning in Jimmie's brain. He forgot Dinny's instructions about the third purse.

The charge that he was yellow filled his mind. It was as though Spike was there watching him, and waiting to see the pulled punches and the retreats before attacking, which had been the teaching of Dinny Wheeler.

At the tap of the bell, Jimmie was upon his man. Even Dinny gasped at the speed of his shift, the darting of his left, and the lashing of his right. The Coast fighter was bewildered.

Before thirty seconds of fighting had elapsed, the crowd was on its feet, electrified by the fury of Jimmie's attack. He beat his man across the ring and back again.

The desperate blows the besieged one offered were brushed aside on the crest of a raging offensive. In less than a minute of fighting the local boxer was rolling along the ropes in a punch-drunk condition.

Then Jimmie showed his experience. He stopped short, set himself, measured his man for a right—and the fight was over. The crowd was still cheering madly when

the count was done and the beaten man aided to his corner.

Among the seconds of both men there was a stunned silence. None had imagined there would be staged such a reckless, furious battering.

Jimmie waited at the loser's corner until he was revived. The Coast fighter grinned a good-natured surrender when his senses came back. The crowd, fascinated, stood about to watch the calm after the storm.

Jimmie went smilingly to his corner, slipped into the robe which Dinny held for him, and climbed down from the ring. A throng was there to pat his shoulders as he passed, to sing their fickle praises from lips that still trembled with excitement. He was a hero, a fighter who fought!

In the dressing room, Wheeler was strangely silent. There was no need of a real rub-down, since Jimmie had not even mussed his hair during the fight. So the hired rubber merely went over his back and shoulders with a damp towel and then a small quantity of alcohol.

There were men about the room, strangers who gathered around the rubbing table and talked to Jimmie, heedless of the fact that he did not answer them. As he lay there, an idea came to him. He would square himself with Spike by sending him the most complete account of the fight he could get.

Ultimately, Jimmie and Dinny worked their way free of the fight club, and into a taxi that would take them to their hotel. The boxer's mind was filled with thoughts of Nellie and Spike.

He intended to write them both a letter that very night. He would try to make Spike see things as they were.

It was when he was in his room with Dinny that he learned the amazing cause of the ex-champion's silence. Wheeler said suddenly:

"What's the big idea, Jimmie? I thought you were going to carry that bum along!"

"You wouldn't understand, Dinny." Jimmie laughed. "It's a matter that—"

The face of the ex-champion flushed, and his eyes shot fire as he interrupted.

"I guess I wouldn't understand!" he roared. "Neither would any other right guy! Do you think I'm a sap? I've played fair with you all the way! Now you cross me up."

"Cross you up!" Jimmie gasped. "What

do you mean? There he was, wide open. The last time we boxed I fooled with him too long, and he pasted me. I don't get you!"

"You promised to carry that bum the route!" Dinny grated. "You know damn well you did!"

"But what difference does it make, Dinny? I got him easy enough, and made the thing sure."

"You lie like hell!" Dinny raged at the stupefied Jimmie. "You know damn well you pulled a wise one! You had dough bet on yourself to finish him in a round, and you were smart enough to let me put—"

"I did not! You're crazy, Dinny! I knocked him over because—"

"That welcher Spike planned the thing, too!" Dinny thundered. "I should have known there was something up when he ran out like that!"

Jimmie looked dazedly at his manager. He could scarcely credit the evidence of his own ears.

He was angry himself because Dinny had accused him of lying. But he smothered his own emotions in a conviction that Dinny was laboring under a misunderstanding. He walked toward him, his hand extended in a friendly gesture.

"Honest, Dinny, you're wrong!" he said. "Don't think I did a thing like that."

"Think be damned!" Dinny shouted. "I know damn well you did! That rat, Spike, never liked me, anyhow! He put you up to this, and made me bet my own dough that this bum would go the route. I'll bet I covered your own bet! And you crossed me, after I've made you every nickel you got."

"You lie!" Jimmie snapped. "I never yet bet on a fight."

"I lie, do I?" Dinny snarled. "Well, maybe I'm old, but I'm better right now than you ever will be! You got a pasting coming to you, smart guy!"

With the words, he was on Jimmy like a tornado. His clenched fists bruised the fighter's cheeks and split his lips.

In automatic self-defense, Jimmie drove his right to Dinny's stomach, and the older man grunted in spite of himself. That blow broke up his attack and he backed away, his face pale, but his eyes burning and his hands still in the fighting attitude.

"Don't be a damn fool, Dinny," Quin-

lan said, disgustedly. "You'll see things differently after awhile!"

Then he deliberately turned his back on Wheeler and walked to the wash basin to bathe his split lip. Dinny sank into a chair. After that there was silence, except for the sound of the running water.

Presently Jimmie straightened up and said:

"If you want to know why I socked that bimbo, Dinny, I'll show you!"

He went to the bureau and picked up the crumpled telegram that Spike had sent. He threw it to Dinny, who pressed it out over his knee and read it.

"That's why Spike quit me!" Jimmie explained. "He knew I wasn't fighting the way I ought to! When I got that wire I made up my mind to show 'em. That's all there is to it."

"Sure!" Dinny lamented. "But why not tip me off? I go down on a sure thing and get trimmed like a sucker. They took me for plenty! Not only that—three sports writers got the same dose!"

"Why not tip me off that you're betting?" Jimmie asked.

"You wouldn't have fought!" Dinny admitted frankly. "I know damn well you wouldn't!"

"Have you been doing this right along, Dinny?" Jimmie demanded.

"Certainly! I've been cleaning up. I've taken twice the purse out of every town we hit. Why not? That's the way it's done, kid."

Jimmie dropped back into a chair and thought his manager's words over for a few moments. Finally he said: "Then I've been faking fights all the time, Dinny."

"No! You've been giving the customers a run for their dough and building up the home town talent. Why not? If it wasn't for these local boys you wouldn't get the shot!"

"Don't be betting any more, Dinny," Jimmie said at last. "I guess I'm a little dumb."

"Not that, Jimmie," the ex-champion protested, impressed by the misery on Jimmie's battered face. "But don't get the idea that you're a champion! You've got a sweet right, a nice left, and a pretty good heart. But the dough you get will come from my brains before it will from your fists!"

"Whatever I am, I'm not a crooked gambler!" Jimmie retorted, hotly. "I

started fighting because I loved it. I never got wise to all this dirt."

"The sticks are full of suckers!" Dinny laughed hardily. "Ten years from now it 'll all be forgotten. Then, if you're broke, whose fault is that?"

Spike's telegram flashed into Jimmie's mind. It was just as yellow, Spike thought, to be afraid to tackle life outside the ring as it was to quit inside it.

He nodded glumly to Wheeler's argument, went again to the basin and rinsed his mouth with cool water. Then he walked to Dinny and held out his hand.

Wheeler hesitated only a moment, then took the hand and arose, a half grin on his face.

"I'm sorry I socked you, Jimmie," he said, "and you're a prince not to kill me for it—but you've got to learn! I'm getting you dough that would be impossible to you any other way."

"I guess you're right, Dinny—but paste this in your glove: hereafter I *fight*. Match me with any guy you want, and if you're going to bet I can't stop you. But I'll always be in there whaling away with all I got!"

Dinny shrugged to show his indifference, and went toward the door. Jimmie raised his voice to say:

"And don't be too sure I'm not a champion, Dinny! I think I am, and now I'll find out. I'm going back East to-morrow. Wire McGort and see if he can match me with Jack Grover."

"*Jack Grover!*" Dinny gasped in surprise. "Don't be foolish! That guy would take you the way Grant took Richmond! He'd put you out of the game in four rounds, Jimmie!"

"Then out I go!" Quinlan said, sturdily. "If you want your end of the purse, wire him. I won't fight these bums any more."

Wheeler paused at the door, his forehead creased in doubt.

"Take it or leave it, Dinny," Jimmie added. "It's Grover or nobody."

"Have it your way!" Dinny grunted. "He'll be glad to give you a crack at the title. He's looking for guys like you! I'll make the match and take my end. I'll bet it, too, that you don't go six rounds—if the fight isn't in!"

"It won't be in," Jimmie rasped. "If he beats me, or I beat him, it 'll be on the level, Dinny!"

Wheeler whistled softly and walked

away. Jimmie at once sent this wire to Nellie Downs:

Arrive home last of this week. Please tell Spike I won in a minute to-night. I fight Jack Grover for the belt next or I never fight again.

XIV

WHEN Jimmie Quinlan got home, Spike Martin was not there.

The fighter had hoped that his old friend would be at the little station, and that he might again feel the clasp of his hand.

But Nellie was there. She kissed him tenderly, and clung to his arm as he greeted others who had gathered to welcome him. Old Tom Morgan was there, too, and he came to Jimmie and shook his hand weakly.

"Somebody raised hell with your eye, eh?" he said slyly. "You sure stopped a nice one then!"

At the first opportunity, Jimmie asked Nellie about Spike. She replied that she had told Spike of Jimmie's wire, and he had nodded, then disappeared.

"He said he had nearly as much money as you, Jimmie," she added, "and that he was going to look around for some sort of a business chance."

"Did he tell you why he came back here before I did?" Jimmie asked.

"No. He just said you didn't need him any more."

The girl looked anxiously at Jimmie as she said that. He laughed angrily, and remarked that Spike must have been touched by the sun on the Coast.

Dinny Wheeler's prophecy of a title match came true. By the intelligent use of newspaper clippings, and no little talk on his own part, he convinced the promoters that the crowd would pay to see Champion Jack Grover beat Jimmie Quinlan, the logical contender.

Quinlan eagerly agreed to fight on a percentage of the gate receipts. Two weeks after his return to town, he started training for what Dinny Wheeler called "the big shot."

In all that time nothing was seen or heard of Spike. It appeared to Jimmie that, with the sport pages carrying the impending battle, Spike must know of it.

Nellie said that she cared little whether Jimmie won the great bout. She hoped that he would soon come to the end of his boxing days, forget the glamour of the ring, and settle down to normal life.

But Jimmie was supremely confident. He thought he could beat any man alive at welterweight.

He must win, he told himself. He must show Dinny Wheeler that he was all he considered himself—a champion, and a clean fighting one.

Jimmie asked Nellie to attend the fight, but she declined. It would be broadcast to her radio. He did not insist, although he would have dearly loved to have her see the crowd acclaim him.

Dinny trained him faithfully, rigorously. He hired sparring partners of high merit, and never was Jimmie in better shape.

Wheeler reported that the big town was fight mad, and that, on his percentage, Jimmie ought to get between thirty and forty thousand dollars. If no rain fell it would be a killing.

The weather was right. The vast stadium was nearly filled before the last light of day had faded. Through the on-coming night the rays of the huge white lights shot their radiance. As darkness settled, the electricians tested the lighting system, and the crowd, anxiously waiting the hour of action, found the impulse to cheer even so simple a thing.

Dinny trailed Jimmie down the aisle to the ring, and they were given an ovation that would have warmed the heart of a king. And the applause that Jack Grover received would have made any potentate grateful.

There were few formalities once the champion and challenger appeared within the ropes. Their pictures were taken for the papers, their names and weights were announced, they received final instructions in the center of the ring, and then went to their corners and stood waiting the bell.

Jimmie Quinlan realized the magnitude of the chance that was his. He must win! Fame and fortune were his for the taking. He was in perfect condition.

At the bell, he came forward, crouched and ready. His mind was alive to every possibility. He was prepared for any eventuality.

Jack Grover met him halfway, and they sparred. The champion carried no smile on his lips. His eyes were steady, and the light in them was as determined as that in Jimmie's own.

Jimmie led with a left and missed. The crowd cheered mildly.

Grover snapped his own left downward

onto Jimmie's forearm. Jimmie tried with a right and missed, and the champion slipped into a clinch. Jimmie caught his arms and smothered them.

But Grover, by a peculiar twist, yanked one glove free, and it flew upward against Jimmie's chin with hurtful power. Some near-by spectator laughed nervously.

Jimmie tried again with the right. He missed, and Grover hit him on the face with both hands, and danced away in a weaving manner that left Jimmie a bit bewildered. Again some one laughed.

They clinched several times in the first round. On each occasion Jimmie found a glove popping against his chin, or an elbow bumping his neck, or a shoulder or a head squarely in his face.

He could not fathom the other man's style. He had a growing sense of helplessness. For the first time in his life he was being outboxed and outgeneraled.

At the close of the round Grover snapped his gloves repeatedly against Quinlan's forearms. It was as if the champion was sparring for points, and hoped the judges would concede an arm blow to be a tally.

Just before the bell, Grover shifted with astonishing speed and dug a wicked left hook into Jimmie's stomach. That blow hurt.

Dinny Wheeler was doing less talking to his fighter between rounds than he ever had before. He did all that could be done to keep Jimmie in the best of condition, but he said nothing either to encourage or discourage him.

When that blow to the body had landed, a fan alongside the ring said: "It won't be long now!"

Jimmie heard him, and realized that he had not yet hit Grover a solid blow. There was something wrong with the manner in which he was fighting the champion.

He decided to try to box only for the first half of the next round. If he failed to score, he promised himself to fight as he had in that last bout on the Coast. He would throw into the balance every ounce of energy and strength he had in an endeavor to battle the champion off his feet.

Grover met him with more quick, sharp blows on the arms. Jimmie felt their hurt; they made the muscles cramped and unwilling to respond. He recognized the value of the champion's plan, and, in retaliation, shot his own fist downward onto Grover's right wrist. Jack countered

sharply to the face with a left hook, and Jimmie backed away.

He could not box this man. In the clinches Grover was a tangle of elbows, shoulders, and gloves. At long range Jimmie was always a trifle late with his leads and counters.

He knew that his lips were swollen. Grover's left hook had done that. He never had felt short blows so hurtful.

Once again they met and clinched. A half dozen times Grover sent wicked little punches to Jimmie's face.

It was baffling. There was no seeing where they came from, no manner of defense that Jimmie could think out.

The referee broke them, and Grover danced away, his left tapping down again and again on Jimmie's arms as the latter plodded after him.

Then, with the suddenness of a thunderbolt, Jimmie darted in. He took a stinging left hook to the ear, but crowded close, both fists flying with all the power he could put behind them.

The champion gave ground under a blow that raised a welt over his eye. The crowd arose in cheers.

Grover's back was to the ropes, and he smiled a little at the fury of Jimmie's attack. Three times he prepared to measure Jimmie with rights, only to find that the challenger was coming too strong, and that he must drop into defensive methods.

Jimmie seemed to have gone fight mad. He thought nothing of defense.

Once Grover straightened him with a blinding right uppercut, but Jimmie reeled into the attack again. When the bell stopped the challenger, the champion was leaning out over the ropes, his face swollen and his lips red. The spectators were yelling to Quinlan's madness with shouts.

During the minute of rest, Jimmie could not relax. He felt that he had solved his problem. He must fight Grover with incessant punches, matching his strength and staying power against that of his opponent.

Across the ring he could see the champion's manager talking earnestly to him. Grover grimly nodded his head.

Then the bell rang, and again Jimmie was upon his man. Grover slipped away from the direct force of a vicious right and hooked his own left with killing power to Jimmie's body. The challenger did not hesitate in his attack.

Grover promptly weaved into a clinch,

and time and again pounded the back of Jimmie's neck. They fought that round through with a fury that was epic.

Grover still danced away, shooting rapier lefts and battle-ax rights. Jimmie slugged on, his face marked and bruised, but his spirit and strength unfailing. Occasionally Grover straightened him up with rights.

At the bell the crowd was almost hysterical. Jimmie was giving them a fight that was a *fight!*

And, at the opening of the next round, he did not pause in his whirlwind tactics. He met Grover as the latter left his chair. They traded rights to the head and clinched.

Jimmie appeared enraged. He wildly twisted free, Grover's right landing again as he did so, then shot out his own right in an overhand blow.

The crowd shrieked as the glove thudded on the champion's chin. Grover fell away and sagged at the knees. Jimmie crowded in, both hands flying a little wildly.

With the expertness of a veteran, Grover weathered the storm. Jimmie never did know how the champion got into a clinch that round.

He slid close, and his arms muffled Jimmie's desperate efforts as might coils of heavy rope. The referee sidled ineffectually around them.

The champion clung for dear life. Jimmie knew that he was stung, and holding on until his head cleared.

So Jimmie fought with fury to get free and punch again, but Grover was too good, too slippery. The round went to Jimmie by a wide margin.

The fight crowd was offering excited comment. Jimmie could hear men declaring that he could not maintain such a pace.

In his heart he knew that this was true. It seemed to him that if Grover chopped down again on his arms they must hang lifeless. He found his mouth dry, and knew that Jack Grover had caused this condition with elbows and forearms at his throat in the clinches.

He knew now that Grover was the shrewder fighter. Dinny had been right. Jimmie Quinlan was not a champion!

But he sallied forth desperately again at the bell, and this time the vast crowd got the thrill of its life. The champion had been instructed to go out and fight.

When Jimmie began his onslaught, Grover faded before it, shifted, stepped inside, and traded punch for punch. They stood toe to toe with the maudlin, screaming throng to spur them on.

Jimmie felt no individual blow. Instead, there was a series of thumps against his body and his head which created a numbness that slowly crept over him.

"Come to it, kid!" Jack Grover snarled. "If this is the way you want it—come!"

Jimmie's body seemed detached from his head. He knew that he was fighting, and that his chance for the title was fading.

Jimmie struggled to regain the fighting spirit that had battered the champion only a little while before. It was gone.

He saw before him a man who beat his arms, and who walked heedless through his punches to batter his body and his head.

Grover was close now. Jimmie saw his bobbing head, and knew that it soon would bump under his chin while Grover's mighty blows pounded his flesh.

Then he felt his knees turning to tal-low, and it seemed to him that he was back in the old McGort fight club, and that Shadow White was there and ready to bring up a right.

There came the same flash of light. It was like an old enemy reappearing.

First it was red and far off, then it grew bigger and bigger, like a danger signal as a train approaches it. It might even have been one of those he had painted!

Jack Grover was gone now. Only the light was there, and the train rushing on.

But now there came a familiar sound. He imagined that he cursed it and that he threw his hands over his ears to crowd it out.

It was a brutal drumming—drumming—drumming—

In the dressing room, Jack Grover came to Jimmie Quinlan and shook his hand, and hoped that he was all right. Jimmie was.

The drumming was gone, and there was only little soreness about his body. His face was marked only by slightly swollen lips. He had removed his gloves and hand bandages, and sat there, with his own thoughts—a challenger who had failed.

Dinny Wheeler appeared quite undisturbed. He assured Jimmie that he had done well. Grover was a champion in all that the word implied.

"You were right, Dinny," Jimmie admitted frankly. "I'm not a champ!"

"We can't all be title holders," Dinny said, philosophically. "But you're damn good, Jimmie! After this fight you'll be able to take fifty thousand out of the sticks in a year!"

"I'm through, Dinny," the fighter declared. "I guess we look at it in different ways."

"You'll feel better to-morrow!" Dinny grinned. "Don't forget I laid dough on Grover to-night! I'm sitting pretty, Jimmie! I told you he couldn't be beaten, didn't I?"

"Yes—and that's all I wanted to find out. Somehow I can't fight just for money. You won't understand—"

"Well, look who's here!" Dinny interrupted sarcastically.

Jimmie turned around and met the eager gaze of Spike Martin. A sob crossed the fighter's lips, and he held out both hands to his friend.

Nellie was right! Spike had come back when Jimmie was a loser and needed him.

"I'm through, Spike," Jimmie said. "I'm not a champ. I've been shown! I'm through with the fight game."

"Sure!" Spike nodded happily. "The best winner is a good loser, Jimmie. You and me and Nellie Downs will be champs outside the ring! We'll go back to-morrow. The town 'll be crazy over you after the fight you made against Grover."

He paused for breath.

"Don't stop!" Dinny Wheeler suggested scornfully. "Have a love feast. You're like a couple of kids. I'm damn glad I had sense enough to get some dough before you both reformed!"

"Sure, I won't stop!" Spike snapped. "You just watch the house him and Nellie build. And Jimmie and me is going in some kind of business, ain't we, Jimmie?"

"It 'll have to be a little one, Spike," the ex-fighter replied, slowly. "I sunk a large chunk of my bank roll on myself to-night!"

"Well, of all the saps!" Wheeler exclaimed. "Didn't I tell you the champ would take you? And I'll bet you were betting against my bet!"

"Never mind, Jimmie!" Spike Martin said hurriedly, with a glare at the amused Dinny. "My money's yours, and if the business ain't big—I won't eat heavy!"

THE END